PARENTS AS PARTNERS?

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CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the question: are parents partners? Far from being an evaluative study of the degree to which partnership is realised in practice, it is the very concept of partnership which has become the problematic I have examined. The focus of this study is a view of partnership which emerged in the mid nineteen eighties - the participatory model. This view of partnership is based on the principles of equality and reciprocity between parents and teachers. I contrast this rhetoric with how the reality of parental involvement is experienced. This is based on ethnographic research of parental participation in two schools. I have looked at the process, perspectives, adaptations and strategies which develop in day-to-day contact between parents, teaching staff and children. This is an aspect of parental involvement which has received little attention in previous academic research. My research highlights the assumptions which underlie both the principles of participatory partnership and existing accounts of the reality of parental involvement. Furthermore, I reveal the hidden reality of women and children as forgotten partners.

INTRODUCTION

In this research I have sought to contrast the rhetoric of parent-teacher partnership with the everyday reality of parental involvement. I have explored how the participation of parents in school is experienced by parents, teachers, nursery nurses and children. I have focused particularly on classroom interactions and the relationships which develop between teaching staff and parents. An understanding of the social process which occurs during this routine involvement is essential to the development of partnership between parents and teachers.

Whilst the concept of partnership between parents, teachers and children is central to much of the current discussion of home-school relationships, few studies have focused at one time on the experiences of all the partners. I have looked, therefore, at how the pragmatic concerns and interests of parents, teaching staff and children relate to the ideals of the rhetoric surrounding partnership.

Background to the study

A key element in the development of this research has been the origins of the study in the collaborative award with the Community Education Development Centre

(C.E.D.C.) in Coventry. It was this collaboration which steered this research to focus on the participatory view of parent-teacher partnership that was being advocated by members of the centre, amongst others, at the time. This view of partnership is based on the principles of equality and reciprocity between parents and teachers. In this thesis I have focused on the experiences of the partners in order to throw light on the assumptions made in participatory partnership and existing research on the reality of parental involvement. The starting point of this research was what the partners themselves felt to be important about parental involvement.

Theory and method

An interactionist model has been used to establish patterns in the perspectives and routine day-to-day actions of the partners in the education of a child. Interactionism concentrates on the way in which the social world is constructed by participants who are continually developing meaning and interpretations of events and situations. They develop key interpretations of situations which form the context in which they construct their actions. In this research I wanted to look at how parents, teachers, nursery nurses and children make sense of parental involvement; how they relate and react to each other; their interests and ends and how they go about achieving them.

Through participant observation and semi/unstructured interviews I explored the views of these partners to reveal their reactions, motives and intentions and explore the way in which parental involvement is seen to operate in the two schools I studied.

The schools

The schools on which the research was based were both involved with the Family Education Centre (F.E.C.) in Midtown. This centre had been set up by the C.E.D.C. to promote, amongst other things, parental involvement in schools.

Baker Primary School was in a period of great change at the point at which I began my research. The school had been created two years previously out of an amalgamation between the Junior and Infant schools. The school had also received community status in that academic year (1987). Plans had been approved to build a community wing to join together the separate junior and infant buildings which both dated back to the early part of this century. The school had 238 pupils (1987) and served a multi-racial community. Ninety percent of the children who attended the school had parents of Asian origin. Seventy percent of these Asian parents were predominantly from villages in rural Shylet in Bangladesh and as a result had little experience of formal education themselves. The other thirty percent, of the Asian parents, were Gujarati

who had emigrated from East Africa. The last ten percent of the school's population were indigenous white parents.

Allestree Infant School served a predominantly white indigenous community who lived on the Allestree council estate. The school had 230 pupils (1987) and was housed in a single story pre Second World War building. The large nursery, which accounted for four out of the ten classrooms in the school, was a product of the development, in the 1970s, of Educational Priority Areas (E.P.A.). These were geographical locations which the Plowden Report (1967) recommended should be identified and given extra resources. E.P.As. were developed in order to counter the educational handicaps which the Plowden Report had identified with social, cultural and environmental factors. Allestree was such an area, characterised by the poor housing, high unemployment rate and low levels of educational qualifications.

These schools contrasted both in the design of their school buildings and the kinds of school population. The schools could also be contrasted in the way in which parental involvement was perceived, aims were constructed and strategies to involve parents were pursued.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts. In Part One, The Rhetoric I contrast the different views on parent-teacher partnership which have developed over the last four decades. I focus in particular on participatory partnership and the principles and assumptions on which the rhetoric is built. In Part Two, Where rhetoric meets reality I take as my starting point aspects of parental involvement which have been identified as barriers to achieving partnership. That is, professionalism (Chapter Three) and parents' experience of the working life, rather than the educational life, of the school (Chapter Four). I question the assumptions which have been made about parental involvement in existing research and explore the views and experiences of parents, teachers and nursery nurses at Baker and Allestree Schools. In the final part of the thesis, The neglected reality, I highlight how the rhetoric which surrounds partnership provides ideal accounts of how parents and teachers should experience partnership, but has neglected specific experiences of mothers and children. This section then goes on to explore the experiences of these two partners. In the conclusion, I draw out the themes which have emerged in this study of the reality of parental involvement and point out their implications for the rhetoric of parent-teacher partnership.

I begin with Chapter One, An autobiographical account of the research process. This chapter looks at how the focus

of this thesis, the rhetoric and reality of parent-teacher partnership, developed. At the same time I analyse my experiences of the processes and problems of doing ethnographic research.

CHAPTER ONE

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Research is no longer viewed in terms of a linear model whereby the researcher reviews the literature, establishes the research problems, goes out into the field to collect the data and then returns to analyze and write up the data (Burgess 1984). As Fetterman states:

> ....reaching a destination in ethnography often means taking false paths, coming up against dead ends or detours, and sometimes losing the way all together. (Fetterman:1989: p9)

Research should be viewed as a social process. This means researchers need to give greater consideration to the techniques, theories and processes they develop when conducting research. This account of my methodological approach will focus on such processes. It reveals something of the dilemma I faced over the theoretical overview I should take and thus the resultant questions I asked about parental participation in the education of their children. It was a process by which I came to terms not only with the theory and methods I employed but, also, my identity as a research student. This is an autobiographical account of the research process that

aims to uncover the 'real' experience and move beyond the rhetoric found in some accounts of social research.

The focus of my thesis is the rhetoric and the reality of partnership between parents and teachers. I will begin this account by examining how this focus emerged.

The original brief for the Economic and Social Research Council (E.S.R.C) collaborative award, gained in the autumn of 1986, focused on parents' experiences of their involvement in school. The researcher was to employ qualitative methods to explore such experiences. My initial research proposal had led me to question what 'involvement' actually meant to the parents. To all intents and purposes my theory and methods were outlined. I was going to use participant observation, unstructured interviews and documentary evidence in order to uncover the social meanings that lay behind the kinds of involvement which parents pursued.

During my reading of such areas as: parental involvement, community schools and primary teaching, I kept returning to two questions:

1) What **should** parent-teacher relationships be like?
2) Were parent-teacher relationships based on conflict, control or negotiation?

It was from my consideration of these questions that I developed an interest in the rhetoric and the reality of parent-teacher relationships.

Initially, I was apprehensive about making a decision regarding the focus of my research. I feared that if I chose the research focus too early, I may regret it later:

> At the moment, I fear that by focusing [my research] I might omit some important aspect of parental involvement. I'm frightened to focus in case I regret it later, there is so much to look at! [1]

At the time, there seemed to be so many questions that I could address in my research. In retrospect, I can see that my focus emerged very early. Two months into my study I wrote in my research diary. "The concept of partnership [between parents and teachers] is interesting. What does it mean in theory and practice?"[2] However, research is an untidy process (Burgess 1984). I will outline how the research focus emerged, submerged and developed during reading, field work, analysis and writing.

The Reality of Parent-Teacher Relationships

In my original proposal I had outlined how I would explore parents' perceptions of parental involvement. The more I read the more I began to question if this was adequate.

It was during this first six months of my research that I became interested in the writings of William Cowburn. In his book, Class, Ideology and Community Education. Cowburn looked at why community education had emerged (Cowburn 1986). Cowburn situated his analysis of parental involvement in the reproduction and legitimation of capitalist relations of production. For Cowburn, it was not enough to contrast the rhetoric of community education with how it was practiced (the type of contrast which was becoming the focus of my research):

> Our assessment [of community education] will be a more valid and sophisticated one for it will not have confused the objective purpose of community education and education overall with the purpose as stated by interested parties. Reality will not be confused with rhetoric. (Cowburn:1986:p6)

For Cowburn there was an underlying reality (the objective purpose of education in capitalist society) which could be compared with the rhetoric of community education. Such an analysis led me to question whether my focus on parental understandings of their

'realities' was adequate. Was there not an 'underlying' reality I was in danger of overlooking?

Sharp and Green have argued that by concentrating on meaning, researchers neglect people's relationship to the material world (Sharp and Green 1975). For Sharp and Green, actions can be constrained, no matter how people define reality. I was in a dilemma: were parent-teacher relationships determined by economic relationships or created through interaction and negotiation?

Negotiation and Control

To answer these sorts of questions I initially felt it was vital to take a more macro perspective on parent-teacher relationships. I returned to Cowburn. He argued parental involvement, like all education, evolved to facilitate the reproduction of the working classes and maintenance of the status quo. Cowburn questioned the assumption that the move to allow parents into the classroom was 'progressive'. Parents were now welcomed in to school so they could understand what the professionals were doing. Cowburn argued that the baseline had remained the same. Working class experiential knowledge continued to be labelled as the antithesis to 'real' knowledge. Secondly, the academic failings of working class children were still seen to be a result of working class parents' attitudes and

lack of educational know-how. Cowburn concluded, that the maintenance of the bourgeois control of the educational system had been achieved by what appeared to be opposing methods: excluding parents from, and welcoming parents to, school.

Inspired by Cowburn's problematic and analysis, I began to ask the question: Why are parents asked to be involved in their children's education? Why was Government legislation apparently attempting to increase parental power within school? In my search for an answer Beattie's (1985) research on parental involvement in five European countries appeared useful. Beattie had concluded that the main purpose behind governments providing for parental representation in schools was to legitimize governmental policies at a time of educational controversy. Only secondly, Beattie argued, were governments concerned to ensure that their actions were in response to public demands.

The emphasis in both of these accounts was upon the determining effect of the social structure. The actions of parents and teachers were not seen to emerge out of interaction but were seen as by products of the social structural forces either directly or mediated by the cultural hegemony of the ruling class. This all seemed some distance from my original question: what were parental experiences of school? However, I still

remained attracted to Cowburn's argument:

> When it [community education] seeks to involve working class people in school it does so in order for them to understand and accept as needing no challenge, that which the school say they are doing. (Cowburn:1986:p23)

I began to feel that parental involvement was about **making** parents accept the education which their child received in a community school, indeed any school. But how were parents 'made' to accept, 'that which the school was doing'?

For Cowburn, the answer lay in the move within community education to offer 'education for sale' (Midwinter 1977). Under Midwinter's formula for Community Education parents became consumers and supposedly decided the success or failure of the school initiative. Cowburn, however, pointed out that like all consumers, parents take what is made available to them and are educated to desire what is made available to them. I agreed with Cowburn's analysis that working class parents were part of the process by which working class children were labelled as failures by the educational system. However, I found it harder to accept his idea that parents were in some way gullible consumers of what the school offered their children. Because parents **appear** to have accepted the teachers' definitions of what counts as education it does not mean that parents have in fact accepted it. I felt this

analysis was too deterministic in its account of the actions of parents. Could all parental actions be seen to be the product of capitalist relations? Should not a distinction be made between intentions, motivations and actions? What seemed important to me was people's ability to impose their definitions of the situation upon other actors.

While I was implicitly rejecting the notion of control as the raison d' etre of parent-teacher relationships, I was not side-stepping the issue of conflict. Class conflict, however, is not the only conflict that has been highlighted in parent-teacher relationships. For Waller, writing in the 1930s, conflict between parents and teachers was endemic (Waller 1932). This was a conflict which arose out of the teachers' universalist view of the pupils, and the parent's particularist view of their child (for a contemporary advocate of this theory see Pollard 1985).

For Sharpe (1979), parent-teacher conflict was limited to particular situations. Sharpe felt the significant conflict between teachers' universalist and parents' particularist views arose over the differentiation of pupils. He argued that the continual change in pupils' identities during their school career had to be managed within parent-teacher relationships. Sharpe felt that discrepancies in teachers' and parents' definitions of

a child's behaviour or ability threatened the basis of parental involvement:

> The process of differentiation creates the objective condition for negotiation by disturbing the basis of parental involvement with the school (Sharpe:1979:p110)

Where the commitment and support of parents is required by the school, there is likely to be negotiation over such discrepancy. Sharpe's thesis would indicate that negotiations are possible between parents and teachers.

I still had the option of 'testing' macro theorists and their account of the underlying social reality of parent-teacher relationships. Nevertheless, I was committing myself to what John Van Maanen has described as:

> the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of others. (Maanen:1988:pix)

I was increasingly drawn to focusing on how the social reality of parental involvement was constructed. Yet what of the rhetoric that surrounds this 'reality'?

Partnership: Rhetoric or radical redefinition?

My review of the literature had involved not only an examination of the nature of parent-teacher relationships, it also inspired an interest in accounts of what parent and teacher relationships **should** ideally be like. I was particularly absorbed by the whole notion of partnership between parents and teachers. A number of organisations (C.E.D.C., the School of Education at the University of Nottingham and the National Children's Bureau) had begun to question the principles which underlined the idea of partnership.

I was working in collaboration with one of these organisations, the Community Education Development Centre, as part of my E.S.R.C. Collaborative Award in the Social Sciences (C.A.S.S). The director of the Family Education Unit at the time, Kate Torkington, was disenchanted with the progress being made towards parent-teacher partnership. Her rethinking of the term partnership led to a focus on teacher professionalism. This was reflected in the work of the C.E.D.C. There was a conscious move from installing projects in schools to an emphasis on teacher training. My involvement with the centre coincided with these changes in the way parent-teacher relationships were perceived and idealised .

I became intrigued with the assumptions that underlined the principles of this new partnership. These organizations (the National Children's Bureau and the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, as well as the Community Education Development Centre) spoke of a partnership between parents and teachers which accepted:

> a) Parents' skills and knowledge were different but equal to teachers. Parents had a greater knowledge of their individual child and teachers should use their general knowledge and skills to build on parents' knowledge. (Torkington 1986)
>
> b) Teacher and parent relationships should be about equality. (Wolfendale 1985)

The more I considered these issues, the more I began to ask myself questions about the power relationships that existed between parents and teachers, community and school. Who had the power to ensure that parents' knowledge came to be seen as equal in status to teachers' knowledge? Could the teachers ensure this equity or was it not more fundamental than this? We were, after all, talking of the exchange of common sense knowledge for school knowledge. What then counted as valid knowledge in parent-teacher relationships? Given the questions that could be raised regarding these principles, I decided to treat them as a problematic to be addressed and not as something to be taken for granted.

It was with these theoretical qualms that I entered the field to carry out my research. I was still not sure if I should be looking at why parents were being involved in their children's education or how parents and teachers experienced their involvement. Furthermore, how did this all relate to the rhetoric of partnership? This dilemma was reflected in a paper I wrote for a research seminar entitled "When finding the research question seems harder than finding the answers!" The paper reflected my difficulty in locating the research question as a result of pondering over macro and micro theory; determinism and free will; rhetoric and 'reality' (but whose?).

As I entered the field, I decided to focus upon the issue of partnership. I was to study a school recognized by the C.E.D.C and the F.E.C.. (The Family Education Centre) for its efforts in trying to involve parents. Here I felt I would be able to compare the rhetoric of partnership with parental involvement in practice. In other words, Baker School would be a critical case. This was the kind of school where one would most expect a movement towards the idea of partnership. My question, then, was whether parents' involvement had made any meaningful change. I was aware that in addressing such questions I was showing more interest in the product and not the process of parental involvement.

On entering the field, my theoretical perspective was not clear. Glaser and Strauss argue that such a perspective is crucial in helping to identify the relevant data and significant abstract categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). However, I had a set of practical problems which had developed through my reading of the rhetoric that surrounds parent-teacher partnership. For example, what counts as valid knowledge in parent-teacher relationships? I was also concerned with how teachers actually managed parental involvement in school given the emphasis in the literature on the constraints of teachers' professionalism. My research questions were greatly influenced by the principles of partnership and the inferred radical changes in parents that are documented in the literature. It was under these very broad guidelines that I began to collect my data. In order to uncover some of the day-to-day process of parental involvement in school, I had decided to employ participant observation. None of the studies I had read up to then actually observed daily contact between parents and teachers. The only accounts consistently available were head teachers' accounts of their own schools.

Initially, I adopted the 'big net approach' (Fetterman 1989). That is, seeing as much as is possible of the research setting. This wide-angled view of events included observing different situations in which

parents and teachers met: workshops for parents; ready-for-school groups; parent-toddler groups; the drop-in group; and parents waiting to collect their children from school.

Every night, during the Spring Term of 1987, I recorded what I had observed in my field notes. At Half Term, I sat down and tried to make sense of what I had seen. The paper that resulted again reflected my interest in conflicting explanations of parental involvement provided by macro and micro theories. The paper, entitled 'Compliance or Partnership?', outlined the difference between what teachers felt was pragmatically and ideally possible to achieve with parents. It also focused on the teacher's organization of the classroom when parents were present, and the strategies they used to direct the behaviour of parents. The paper emphasized that teachers were in the process of defining to parents what counted as valid knowledge and how knowledge should be transmitted and evaluated in the classroom. My initial time at the school was framed by my dual interest. Firstly, a desire to discover the social understandings of parental involvement of both parents and teachers; and, secondly, to uncover the social processes which developed. It was not only theoretical dilemmas I had to come to terms with. The methods I employed were also problematic. Here, I want to turn to the initial experiences of doing field work.

Taking and Making Roles

I had often visited and worked in primary schools prior to obtaining this research studentship. I had considered pursuing a career as a teacher and I had helped in schools in order to gain some insight into teaching. However, entering school as a researcher was a different experience altogether. As a helper, your position and status is well defined. My status as researcher seemed somewhat more ambiguous and unclear. This led to insecurities on both sides. Denzin has commented on the need for the participant observer to carve out a role in the research setting and the difficulties this can involve:

> Cultures do not provide, within their social structure, a role called participant observer...participant observers must convince those they are studying to accept them and allow them to question and observe. (Denzin:1978:p185)

I had been drawing on my previous experiences of being in schools but, perhaps because of the reasons outlined by Denzin, I did not feel as comfortable in the role of researcher.[3] On the first day in the school I noted in my research diary:

> It's a strange reaction I get off the staff and the Head. I don't really feel very welcome. Don't know if it is because there is an imminent upheaval with teachers swopping classrooms. I feel the ancillary staff made me feel more welcome! I don't know if I feel more uncomfortable because of my role as

> researcher. Before, when I have been into schools it has been as a teacher's help, as a potential teacher wanting to learn [experience for a P.G.C.E.]. I sometimes think that as a researcher I threaten them.[4]

I was certainly a stranger to the kinds of reaction I received in school as a researcher. The Head had gone out of her way, in our first meeting, to establish the boundaries of my participation in the school. I was to be an outsider. Furthermore, her expectations of me had also been shaped by her experience of student who had previously carried out research in the school. This was a (BEd) student who had made just four visits to the school in order to ascertain the information he needed. This was a precedent which plagued my time at the school. My observational work and qualitative approach were very different. The Head Teacher had very clear ideas, based on a quantitative methodology, regarding what my research should be about. In the early days of the field work, I felt I was having to prove myself as a researcher to the Head Teacher. On top of this I became increasingly aware of the power which the Head Teacher and the teachers had to define my role as a researcher. Indeed, the power the staff held to make my presence both visible and invisible within the school.

Researcher made visible and invisible

I have already outlined how I was defined as an 'outsider' by the Head. I never felt particularly comfortable in the staffroom (Which was unlike the experience in the second school I studied). I made an effort to join in general conversation and engage individuals in conversation. It always seemed that the teachers wanted the time for themselves. I coped by trying to merge into the background:

> Dinner time was the same as ever. A gentle process of blending into the paint work (i.e. reading something, this time a report on a gender awareness project) so that the staff can quite happily ignore me until I chip in.[5]

> Usual lunch. Sitting in the staffroom, saying the odd word here and there and feeling very uncomfortable.[6]

Staff continually exercised great control over my research role rendering me not only invisible but at times highly visible. For example, in the workshop held in the infant classroom, the teacher often treated me as an assistant during craft activities. Mrs. Small (the teacher) would instruct me and not the parents on the techniques for constructing a mountain out of paper or painting the sea. I was concerned how this would affect the parents' perceptions of my role in the classroom. There was a danger of me being accorded the status of teacher. In practice, I was often as ignorant

as the parents about the methods employed in the classroom. With reference to one workshop on number work, I wrote in my research diary:

> I know how the parents must feel. I fear I may be teaching them [the children] incorrectly; showing the children bad habits. I feel it would be best to 'leave it to the teacher'.[7]

Whilst I acknowledge now that I cannot project my own feelings onto others. My experience did serve to highlight possible issues regarding the novice's experiences of new teaching methods. The beginning of the research experience was not just about experiencing inadequacies in terms of abilities to teach children. Field work also involved a process of coming to terms with inadequacies I perceived in myself as a researcher.

Researcher competency: a re-assessment

There were occasions during the beginning of the field work when I began to question my own competency as a fieldworker. I was constantly measuring myself up to my view of the 'ideal' researcher. This was a researcher who established perfect relationships with the people she was researching. A researcher who was able to eliminate any reactivity within the research situation. A researcher with boundless time and energy. A

researcher who could never exist. My early days in the field were spent coming to terms with the 'realities' of the situation. I had to learn how to accommodate to situations as they arose. This meant recognising that apparent disasters in the field were potential sources of data.

There were times in Baker School when I felt I exercised little control. Initially, I felt this reflected my incompetency as a researcher. Yet Paul Atkinson, in his study of medical students, concluded:

> The rhetoric of 'control' is part of the language of experimental or quasi-experimental research: it is inherent in the method that the 'subjects' of experimentation, the setting of their behaviour should be under the control of the researcher to the maximum extent. In the field work, such control has to be surrendered. The 'subjects' are responsible for their own activities and for constituting the setting of the research. In my own field work I was to a great extent in the hands of the consultant doctors in matters of what I could and could not do, where I could go and so on. (Atkinson:1981:p137)

In my field work it was teachers and not doctors who appeared to exercise great influence over the situations in which I met the parents. They had control over how I was made visible to the parents in the school, just as Atkinson had been dependent upon the doctors to make his presence visible to the patient.

An example of this process was the group of mothers that I sat with at the end of each infants' workshop. I had been given this group by the infants' teacher to obtain feedback from them about the workshop. In these sessions, I hoped to begin to explore the women's experiences of the workshops. However, it became apparent that the women wanted the sessions to relax and have a chat amongst themselves. "This is the best bit!", one women had commented. I felt deeply inadequate because I was not using the sessions to spark off group discussions about the workshops in particular and the school in general. Instead, I would chat to individual women whilst the other women chatted amongst themselves. Later, I came to see the desire of these women to use the time for themselves as a vital part of some women's experience of school.

The teacher, who had given me the opportunity to speak to these women after the workshop, had certain expectations about the kinds of information I would be able to pass on to her. Increasingly, I began to feel I was being put in the position of a spy. For me, this was not simply an issue of role taking but also involved the whole idea of obligations. As a participant who is making observations there is a real feeling that you are taking in the situation and not giving anything back in return. Here the teacher had created a situation in which I would be able give something back by informing her on the parents' views

of the workshop. Yet, was this spying? By taking part, would I actually be affecting the situation I was observing? These issues came to a head when I finally let a parent's comment 'slip'.

The 'Slip'

This was an incident where I relayed a parent's comment on the workshops to the teacher who organised them. I immediately felt I had broken ethical rules and my actions raised questions regarding the internal validity of the study:

> She [the teacher] asked if they [the parents] had said anything about today's workshop. I said, rather hastily, that Mrs. Davies had commented that it [the workshop] was rather unorganised. I told Shirley [the teacher] that the parent added that she wasn't too sure if it wasn't Philip [her son] who was the problem. Shirley believed that Philip had been unsettled. She commented that all the children had been wandering around the class a lot during this workshop. Mrs. Davies had commented to Shirley that they were, "getting it out of their system before tomorrow" [When a group were coming to video the story book approach in her classroom]. Shirley left the classroom and came back a few minutes later and immediately justified to me why the classroom had not been as organised as usual. She had not had the time to plan what she wanted to do, she argued, as she had to organise things for the video.

I monitored the situation from then on to see if the 'slip' had obviously affected her actions. At the next workshop Shirley stood in front of the class and said to the parents, "Let's get organised!" Her actions were

consistent with an attempt to maintain a competent image of herself as a teacher with the parents.

On reflection, I realise that I gained important insights from this experience, and others like it, into the people I studied. This I feel is one of the most important processes of becoming a researcher. It marked an important change of perception: to move from seeing myself simply as an analyser of data to an object of the research (Scott 1985). Thus situations of apparent incompetency on my own part, when monitored, became valuable sources of data. As Denzin points out, the researcher:

> ...may treat this reactivity as bad and try to avoid it (which is impossible); or they may accept the fact that they will have a reactive effect and attempt to use it to advantage, in a quasi-experimental fashion. (Denzin:1978:p200)

In effect, the 'slip' had become a quasi-experiment. I was able to use this situation to look at the teacher's reaction to the issue of teachers' competence.

Hammersley and Atkinson also discuss the issue of reactivity. They outline the need to recognise the reflexive nature of social research. We are, they argue, part of the world we study. They conclude:

> There is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it, nor, fortunately, is that necessary.....Instead of treating reactivity as merely a source of

> bias, we can exploit it. How people respond to the presence of a researcher may be as informative as how they react to other situations.(Hammersley and Atkinson:1983:p15)

My 'slip' of information provided a situation whereby I was able to exploit this reactivity for theoretical purposes. In effect, I was taking on board Hammersley and Atkinson's proposition. "Data in themselves cannot be valid or invalid; what is at issue are the inferences drawn from them" (Hammersley and Atkinson:1983:p191).

I recognised the importance of monitoring the processes by which events in the field occurred. In doing so another research ideal, or at least assumption, was shattered. I now saw the fallacy of believing I would be able to exercise control over the research situation. I became aware of how teachers and heads could impose their definition of the research situation, and the impact this had on my research. It affected not only the boundaries and nature of my role, and the way in which my research was viewed, but also the sampling procedure.

"A different kind of sampling" (Mead:1953:p654)

I was going into the school to research parental involvement in schools. What should I look at? How could I begin to construct a sample? Here I want to

look at sampling procedures I used in the first school, and discuss the negotiation and control of the unit of study.

When I first began observations at the school I was trying to write down everything. I quickly learned the physical constraints of developing a broad perspective on the institution and recognised the need to focus my study, to define the sample. Burgess has raised the issue of whether boundaries can be clearly established in the field of study (Burgess 1984). I became aware of the issue of boundaries early on in my research.

Choosing situations to sample

Like Becker, in his study of crime, I was conscious that there was no definitive list of participants for my study (Becker 1970). I found myself asking what kinds of activities constituted parental involvement in school? On my first visit to the school, the Head had outlined to me activities where parents were involved in the school. In doing this her definition of what counted as parental involvement became clear. I was aware that she had omitted the drop-in group and included all the activities which were directly related to the education of the children. My own definition of parental involvement in school was much wider. I wished to include all the experiences that parents had of school. This would mean that the drop-in group, as well

as the workshops, were matters to be sampled. My definition of parental involvement meant that standing chatting to parents in the playground was as valid as observing assemblies where parents participated. I wanted to look at the whole network of situations where parents were to be found in the school.

Observing routine or crisis behaviour?

My reading led me to an interest in certain events as the focus of my observations, such as the routine encounters between parents and teachers. How did teachers talk of what was pragmatically and ideally possible with parents? How did these views relate to their perceptions of parents as individuals and the parent community? This, in turn raised the question of how parents viewed teachers. What changes had parents experienced as a result of becoming more involved in the school? This last question was raised as a direct result of all the literature on partnership. The literature seemed to be sprinkled with examples of parents who had gained confidence as a result of their involvement in school. I was interested to see if I would witness the metamorphosis of a parent. So, initially, I was observing the routine encounters between parents and teachers and how they behaved during special events, such as Sports Days, Governors' Meetings and so on. Another category of observable

behaviour which Schatzman and Strauss (1973) have outlined is 'crisis'. When I entered the school, it was not with a view to observe crises. However, it became apparent as my study progressed that there was something of a crisis in relations between some teachers and a particular group of parents.

I became aware that the time period I was sampling in the school was not representative of the 'stable' features of the people or their settings. They were a response to particular crises. The school had experienced, and was still in the process of going through, big changes. The Junior and Infant school had amalgamated in the previous two years. The Head had initially established herself as an instigator of change and innovation within the newly formed school. She was seen by parents, and outside bodies such as the Family Education Centre, to be keen to involve parents in the school. The academic year in which I arrived to research the school, they had just received Community School status (one of only five community primary schools in the educational authority). They were beginning to prepare for a community wing to be built to join the Infant and Junior schools together. It was a time of change. A time when the behaviour and attitude of the Head Teacher was also perceived to be changing. Some parents felt the Head was becoming inaccessible and remote. There was increasing dissatisfaction amongst the staff about changes which

many felt were being forced upon them. It was in this context that my research took place. I was able to witness the adaptations made by those parents who perceived a change in the Head and the way parents fitted into what was going on in the school.

A vital research tool in this process were the stories a group of 'regular' mothers shared with me about the school and staff. Stories are part of the process by which individuals make sense of past events and present circumstances (Stimson and Webb 1975). I could use these stories to illuminate the women's experiences of perceived change in the school.

On reflection, I feel it was the potential for dissent, amongst parents and teachers, which accounted for the Head's diligence in outlining the boundaries of my research. As Hammersley and Atkinson point out:

> Whether or not they grant entry to the setting gatekeepers will generally, and understandably, be concerned as to the picture of the organisation that the ethnographer will paint, and they will have practical interests in seeing themselves and their colleagues presented in a favourable light. At least, they will wish to safeguard what they perceive as their legitimate interests. Gatekeepers may therefore attempt to exercise some degree of surveillance and control, either by blocking off certain lines of inquiry, or by shepherding the field worker in one direction or another. (Hammersley and Atkinson:1983:p65)

I became increasingly aware that the Head wished to exclude me from events which were 'new'. Two weeks into the field work, the teachers were to have a week where they taught a different age range. At my first visit, the Head made it clear that I would not be allowed in the school during this period. Like other researchers before me (Cohen and Taylor 1977; Wallis 1976) my investigations were limited by those who controlled the research setting. This questions the naivety of assuming that researchers are somehow able to control the boundaries of their research. The Head of Baker School refused to let me observe other events, such as her organisation of the Fun Day with the parents. Again this was because it was something new which they had to work out amongst themselves before an outsider could witness it. I was not to be a party to developments and changes within the school. As a result, I was only to observe those aspects of the school which were an established part of the routine. While I was directed to observe the routine I became increasingly aware that I was in fact endeavouring to collect teachers' and parents' accounts of parent-teacher contact in the context of crisis.

Methods of research

I used a variety of methods to collect the data: interviews, documentary evidence and participant observation which produced field notes, research diaries and records of informal conversations. I was able to use data triangulation to verify the accounts given. For example, documentary evidence, combined with observational data on teachers' perspectives and actions, began to produce an outline of how parental involvement related to what staff felt the school was all about.

At the end of the Spring Term, I asked the Head if it would be possible to return in the Summer Term to carry out some further field work. She replied, "No!" I left the school depressed, blaming myself and questioning my competence as a researcher and the use of my work to date. The Head told me that I would not be allowed back into the school because major building work was going to occur over the next year. The following term was going to be spent preparing for it. As Hammersley and Atkinson note:

> It is often precisely the most sensitive things that are of most prima facie interest. Periods of change and transition, for example, may be perceived as troublesome by participants themselves, they may wish,

> therefore, to steer observers away from them: the conflict of interests arises from the fact that such disruption can be particularly fruitful research opportunities for the fieldworker.(Hammersley and Atkinson:1983: p66)

The Head, as gatekeeper, was able to shape the conduct and development of the research. At first she had restricted areas of the school open to observation and now she was limiting my time in the school. As a result I had to gain access to another school and pursue a comparative analysis of parental involvement which had never been the intention of the original research plan.

Interviewing

Although unable to return to the school, I was still able to carry out my interviewing. I used issues that had been raised in my observations to form the basis of questions. I had coded my field notes into major topics and listed where the relevant incidents could be found in a separate book (a running record). I used these topics as a framework for developing my research schedule.

I sampled parents in terms of the events they took part in or did not participate in. Some of the data that I collected in these interviews, and the patterns which emerged in the data, came as something of a revelation to me. The interviews emphasized to me the importance of different meanings that people develop in relation

to a specific context. This highlighted the danger of researchers drawing their own conclusions, however tentative, about 'what was going on' in a situation without fully exploring participants own meanings. Emphasis on the subjective meaning of actions is a characteristic feature of symbolic interactionism. In the words of Herbert Blumer:

> On the methodological or research side the study of action would have to be made from the position of the actor. Since action is forged by the actor out of what he [she] perceives, interprets and judges, one would have to see the operating situation as the actor sees it, perceive objects as the actor perceives them, ascertain their meaning in terms of the meaning that they have for actors, and follow the actor's line of conduct as the actor organizes it. In short, one would have to take the role of the actor and see his [her] world from his [her] standpoint. This methodological approach stands in contrast to the so-called 'objective' approach [of positivism] so dominant today, namely that of viewing the actor from the perspective of an outside detached observer. The 'objective' approach holds the danger of substituting his [her] view of the field of action for the view held by the actor. (Blumer:1966:p542)

I sat in the drop-in group week in, week out, drinking coffee, joining in the conversation yet questioning what significance this situation had for my research and the importance the drop-in held for these women. Why did they come to the drop-in when they felt it to be so 'boring'? In interviews, a whole new meaning revealed itself. When asked why they went to the drop-in they did not immediately reply that it was for their personal pleasure as I had anticipated. Instead, they

argued that they went to the drop-in in order that their children would be able to socialize with other children. Their own personal enjoyment was secondary. Similarly, the drop-ins had become boring not simply because there were less women attending but because this meant there were less children there to play with their own children. This led me to look at the relationship between women's roles as housewives and mothers, and their experience of 'leisure' time. I began placing women's experiences of school in the wider context of their lives as housewives and mothers. I was able to make a leap of the sociological imagination between the 'private troubles' of these women to 'public issues' surrounding gender (Mills 1959). As a result I developed an interest in gender roles and the experience of parental involvement; male power and its manifestations within the school. As I began to uncover the experiences of the mothers at the school I increasingly felt it was important to make women visible in research on parental involvement in schools. It seemed that researchers so far had taken their presence in schools for granted.

This illustrates one strategy in the process of data analysis. I began by looking at a particular aspect of my data that struck me as surprising. Other surprises in the data were not as crucial to the development of theory but raised serious methodological issues. Here I am referring, in particular, to my interviews with

Bengali parents. Since I had no Bengali and the parents had little English, I had not been able to observe the terms in which Bangladeshi parents described their children's education and their involvement in it. In interviews, I had to rely upon an interpreter. This was problematic since exact translation is impossible because it is:

> not simply code switching, where one code is retrievable if the other is given. The world of different speakers is not just the same world with different labels attached. (Werner and Campbell;1970;p403)

Given the nature of ethnographic interviewing, where an attempt is made to discover the interviewee's meaning by exploring the terms and phrases they use to describe a situation, there is a serious danger that such meaning could be lost in translation. One thing did become clear - the concept of parental involvement was itself alien to the community. On reflection I question my approach to these interviews. Was I not forcing the information required into English categories by focusing on parental involvement?

Exact translation of my questions was impossible whatever they were. Werner and Campbell suggest that back translation is a strategy to improve the quality of translation. Here two translators are required. One translator translates questions from source language to target language and the other translates them back from

target language to source language in order to assess the quality of the translation. Resources did not allow such checks on the quality of translation. It was difficult enough to find a translator at all. More problems arose since the translator had her own axe to grind regarding the educational needs of the Bangladeshi community. With hindsight I should have spent more time with the interpreter translating key concepts.

Another revelation came when I interviewed parents who I had observed in workshops. There was a significant difference between their behaviour in the workshops and their account of their experiences of the workshops. Parents who went weekly to workshops, and were not seen to question the methods their children were taught by, privately held reservations about how and what their children were being taught. This parental impression management had already been noted in Sharp and Green's study which outlined how parents learnt to present a 'good' parent image to teachers (Sharp and Green 1975). Confirmation of this process, by my research, led me to question further Cowburn's model of parents as educational dupes. Again, I could agree with Cowburn that parental involvement was an attempt by educationalists to gain the support of parents for the type of education their children were being supplied. However, my research findings seemed to indicate that

parental involvement did not lead parents to accept unconditionally the education on offer.

Other evidence led me to acknowledge the complexities of the response by parents to their children's education and their involvement in it. Some parents admitted they had initially been bored at workshops. However, by developing their own view of what they could get out of the workshop their motivation for attending had been renewed. Parental experiences were not always obvious neither was it clear what motivated them to go.

By the end of the summer term, I had developed a number of themes. Women's experiences of school; teacher's practical and idealistic perceptions of parental involvement; and the strategies they developed to direct parental behaviour. At the same time, my data highlighted parents' knowledge of teachers, the meanings which emerged in various situations and the strategies which parents employed in contact with teachers. I decided to research another school. I chose a school which was equally recognized for its work with parents. However, Allestree School contrasted with Baker School both in terms of the school's population and the ways in which parents were involved. I felt if the themes I had developed in Baker School were also to be found in Allestree School, this would indicate they

were not just issues specific to a particular type of school involving parents.

I began my research in the Autumn Term. In Allestree Infant School I decided I would focus on the Nursery section, having already studied a primary school. Here, I would be able to observe the initial contact between parents and teachers in a number of nursery classrooms. In Baker School, I had researched during the Spring Term and so I had not been able to observe these initial encounters. I wanted to investigate the process of establishing parent-teacher relations and to further explore parents' and teachers' knowledge of each other - how they typified each other. I also continued looking for issues which were important to parents and teachers in order to understand how they perceived the situations they faced and their resultant actions.

I had become more adept at locating what was important to participants and had learnt to cope with the demands of ethnographic research - the travelling, the time spent in the field and then writing up the field notes, transcribing interviews, and analyzing data. I decided to adapt my method of note taking in Allestree School. In the previous school, I had tended to jot down an outline of the day's events, noting key phrases and issues, at the end of the school session. I then filled out these notes when I reached home. I had found this an exhausting technique. By the time I had written

these copious notes the last thing I felt like, when I returned home, was writing them up. My involvement in Baker School had not been conducive to rushing off to make notes on events as they happened. Workshops were short, hour long periods and I could not leave the situation for fear that I missed something. The only opportunity I really had for making notes during the course of the day had been scribbles on The Guardian newspaper as I sat in the staffroom attempting the crossword. At Allestree School things were much different. In the nursery context parents were entering and leaving the classroom all day. There were no specific time periods each week for parents to attend the classroom (except Child's Play). Also, each classroom was within easy access to the toilet. As Hammersley and Atkinson note, "a common joke made about ethnographers relates to their frequent trips to the toilet where such hasty notes can be scribbled in private soon after action." (Hammersley and Atkinson:1983:p146). Indeed, this was an accurate description of the method of note taking I developed in the school. When a particular incident or conversation finished, I would often go off to the toilet and try and scribble down what had been said or write down key words or phrases which would trigger my memory when I wrote my field notes later that evening. As other researchers have commented (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, Atkinson 1981), key words and phrases noted in this way

would later allow me to recall great details about incidents which had occurred during the day:

> A single word, even one merely descriptive of the dress of a person, or a particular word uttered by someone usually is enough to 'trip off' a string of images that afford substantial reconstruction of the observed scene. (Schatzman and Strauss:1973:p95)

This technique made writing up field notes a lot more manageable. I was not having to write an outline of the day's events, as a preliminary to writing up the field notes, since my jottings during the day provided such an outline. Furthermore, I felt this technique led to a much richer and more accurate set of field notes. I began to use direct speech in my field notes when referring to conversations made during the day. I tried to record a verbatum account of what had been said, although this was of course impossible. This technique did increase the amount of information I recorded, information which had often been lost in the compressed and summary accounts of my previous note taking. However, employment of this technique was dependent upon the situation. The circumstances prevalent at Allestree had been conducive to this method of recording data.

My analysis of data became more frequent than the half termly sessions at Baker School. At the end of my first two weeks in Nursery One, I categorized my field notes and used these developing categories when moving to

observe the activities in Nursery Two. In this way I was building categories which went across all of the classes. These developing categories guided the collection of data. Thus descriptive categories were developed, for example, on teachers' talk about parents which became refined into analytical categories e.g. parents who teachers described as wanting to 'get rid' of their children, parents who were 'competent' or 'pains'.

I began interviewing parents who visited the nurseries and sampled them according to categories which had developed from my observations. I interviewed parents both in terms of the length of time they had been going to the school and how they had actually experienced their visits to the school - if they had been bored; if they had chatted or simply sat and watched. Initially, I limited myself to six interviews, two women who were on familiar terms with the teachers, one woman who had been bored by her visit, another woman who had experiences of two nurseries, and finally two women who had just begun to bring their children to the nurseries. Their experiences of being in the school, their descriptions of the teachers, what they did in the nursery, helped to establish themes and categories on parental perspectives which I developed with further interviewing.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to interview the people you want. One case comes to mind of a father who began visiting with his daughter - this was quite a rare event and I was keen to interview him. However, he refused saying he had "a lot on". I became sensitive to this response. As I got to know the parents and the teachers I became more aware of the circumstances in which some of the parents lived which made my research pale into insignificance. If someone is about to have their electricity cut off or their marriage is going through a "rough patch" then an interview may be the last thing they want. However, if a woman has two toddlers and is unable to "get out of the house" she may be very glad of someone to come and talk to her (Finch 1984). Finch points out that women's:

> ..consignment to the privatised domestic sphere (Stacey 1981), makes it particularly likely that they will welcome the opportunity to talk to a sympathetic listener. (Finch:1984a:p74)

Like the whole of research, sampling is a social process and the kind of people who want to be interviewed will affect the kind of data which you obtain.

As the number of parents I interviewed increased, key words began to emerge. Parents would talk about "getting to know teachers", knowing "what went on at school" as I reflected on my data from Baker School, I

found that such terms were common to both schools. I focused my interviews so as to unpack these member defined categories (Lofland 1971).

The triangulation of data raised some interesting issues. It became clear that whilst some terms were shared by parents and staff they did not have the same significance and meaning. For example, some staff passed moral judgements on parents who seemed to want to 'get rid' of their children. These parents were not seen to be performing their duties as parents properly. When interviewing these parents I was aware of the need not to moralize on the issue in the same way as the staff appeared to. When these parents raised the subject in the interview (no one had to be prompted) it became apparent that these parents felt 'getting rid' of their children was inevitable and was linked to particular circumstances. Having such feelings was certainly not shocking to the parents concerned but rather matter of fact. The incident taught me two important lessons. First, the importance of data triangulation. Secondly, the dangers of pursuing data triangulation on potentially moralistic issues. The researcher needs to be sure they are not seen to be making the same value judgements. This was relatively easy when interviewing parents about their desire to 'get rid' of their children. Having carried out numerous interviews with three or four children jumping

around the living room I could easily empathise with wanting to 'get rid' of them!

However, acknowledging the importance of all cultural values is not an easy task for the ethnographer, particularly when research subjects express racist and sexist views. This is a problem with trying to practice 'cultural relativity' (Jarvie 1969). In theory, researchers should seek to eliminate prejudice and bias in their study of another culture by suspending their own cultural values. This may result in researchers actively condoning such things as violence (Powdermaker 1966) or in my case racism. Jarvie advises that:

> the observer does himself (herself) no harm if he (she) acts in integrity towards his (her) society and its values as far as possible. (Jarvie:1969:p507)

Jarvie is proposing that the observer, in practice, should maintain and practice the integrity and values of their own culture. This assumes that the choice will always be between the observer and he observed culture. As the previous example from my research indicates, clashes of culture and morals are possible within the research setting. In these situations, it is dangerous for the researcher to be seen to be taking sides. This could possibly be when cultural relativism comes to the fore in field work.

Yet the relationship between cultural relativism and the research process does not only occur at the point of collecting data. Cultural relativity can also be an issue in the analysis of research data. Let us take, for example, Finch's study of working class play groups (Finch 1983,1984b). Her study revealed that working class play group practices diverged from 'bourgeois' standards of child care and pre-school development practices. She was faced with competing cultural views. Alongside this was the danger that her data could be used as evidence of working class women's alleged incompetent and inadequate child care measures. One solution would have been to argue that middle class child rearing methods were different and not necessarily better than working class methods (Finch 1985). However, as Finch points out, the middle class models were what the working class women aspired to and would be judged by. Similarly in my analysis I dismissed cultural relativity as an explanation for how the views of parents and teachers differed regarding the desire to 'get rid' of children. Like Finch, I chose to turn the focus away from parental 'inadequacies' to the culture and character of formal education.

As all these categories were strengthened with more interviews and further observations, I began to explore how and why the teaching staff constructed these categories of parents. What did these categories tell

us about the staffs' concerns and interests? This appeared an important focus to me because it moved away from the issue of teacher professionalism. In the literature, the interests and concerns of teachers regarding parental involvement were sometimes treated as excuses for not allowing parents to become involved. In a sense where teachers' definitions of the 'problems' of parent-teacher contact had dominated research in the past there now seemed an equally distorting move to overlook these concerns and interests. I thought it was important to explore these issues and not simply dismiss them as manifestations of professionalism. What kind of problems did staff face when involving parents? What strategies did they employ to overcome them?

It was not simply a matter of looking for themes and categories. I also constantly compared categories in order to establish links between them. For example, women who were bored when visiting with their child were compared with women who enjoyed their time at school. Eventually, I was able to explain their different experiences in terms of their identification with their roles as housewives and mothers and their views of child rearing. At other times, I sought inspiration for analyzing data by reading literature of analogous situations e.g pupil-teacher relationships.

The links and patterns which developed were further explored through more field work.

Marking the boundaries of participant observer

Participant observation raises serious ethical issues. Like other researchers, (Burgess 1984), I was faced with the question: how can one openly acknowledge that every bit of information, conversation, joke and gesture is potential data? My role as participant observer became something of a joke in Nursery Four. On one occasion Mr. Wit (a teacher known for his sense of humour) said, as way of an introduction, "This is Lorraine, we're not quite sure what she does."

Being observed does have disadvantages for the researched as Lofland has pointed out:

> It happens that participants everywhere do and say many things they would prefer to forget or prefer not to have known. In the process of writing up his [or her] notes, the observer obviously violates these participants preferences. (Lofland:1971:p108)

Aware, perhaps, that every event was potential data, staff used jokes such as, "Don't put that in your book" or overt directions such as, "You didn't see that, did you Lorraine?" as a way of drawing boundaries between what they felt to be legitimate and illegitimate data for my research. As Olesen and Whittaker (1967)

discovered in their nursing study, participants will point out to researchers what are the 'back stage' regions of behaviour for them. So, in the day to day interactions in the nursery classroom, I began to discover what counted as back stage for the staff. However, parents of both schools were not active in defining what should and should not be included in my research. Like Atkinson's medical students, parents were unlikely to question my presence when my access had already been granted by those in power. As Atkinson argues:

> The power to grant or withhold the privilege of access to the group and its daily life was not equally shared by students and the staff. To a considerable degree, it was quite possible for the staff to 'foist' me onto their students, whilst the students had nothing like the same discretion in deciding whether I should observe their teachers. (Atkinson:1981:p136)

In a sense, I was implicated in the power relationships which existed between teachers and parents.

It appeared that some parents had been involved in research projects in the school before:

> Joy explained how she had been asked to write an 'essay' on how she had felt when she first came to the school. She had written about how worried she had been about the prospect of visiting the school. She informed me that they often wrote essays for them (the staff). They has recently had to, 'do something' about their children's behaviour. Did their child wet the bed and so on.[9]

For the parents, then, research was part of their experience of the school; as were the on going flow of visitors. While the staff often found the demands of the constant supply of visitors wearing, I feel I was accepted much more quickly because an outsider's presence was taken for granted in the school.

After nearly a year and a half the fieldwork came to an end. Then began the process of writing up the data. As a C.A.S.S. student I had to write a report for the collaborative agency, the C.E.D.C. Using the working papers I had written, during the field work, I began to write the report. Each chapter focused on the experiences of the different partners in education: children, parents and teaching staff. When the report was finished, I then went on to develop it into the thesis. This was the point at which my focus on the rhetoric and the reality of partnership re-emerged. As I reflected on the issues which my research had produced I began to see how they raised more fundamental questions about the principles of partnership between parents and teachers. It was along this theme which I devised the final structure of my thesis.

This chapter has been concerned with how my thesis developed: the rhetoric and reality of partnership. At the same time, I have looked at how my own experience of the research process led me to question my own

assumptions on the rhetoric and reality of doing research. I have illustrated how defining, developing and pursuing the research problem does not simply begin and end with the literature review. Indeed, the very process of data collection itself can highlight and clarify major gaps in research. It was just such a process which occurred in my analysis of teachers' and nursery nurses' experiences of parental involvement. As I carried out my field work and returned to the literature, I became acutely aware that research on **teachers'** views of parental involvement had tended to fall into two camps. There has been a long tradition amongst researchers to explore the 'problems' of parental involvement as defined by teachers. More recently, there has been a rejection of this form of research and an equally distorting move to almost dismiss the concerns and views of teachers. It is in the context of rejecting these research paradigms that Chapter Three is set. However, before exploring the difference between the rhetoric and reality of partnership between parents and teachers, the next part of the thesis focuses on the rhetoric surrounding the idea of partnership.

FOOTNOTES

1. Research Diary 23.11.86

2. Research Diary 13.11.86

3. If the role was unfamiliar, the setting certainly was not. I had visited a number of Junior and Infant schools for varying periods of time, I now had to make myself a stranger to this familiar territory and suspend all previous knowledge (Schutz 1964). Whilst in some senses the setting was 'all too familiar' my reading of the literature on parental involvement placed a different angle on the setting.

4. Research Diary 2.2.87.

5. Field Notes 9.2.87.

6. Field Notes 16.3.87.

7. Research diary 11.3.87.

8. Field Notes 25.3.87.

9. Field Notes 24.10.87.

Part 1

The Rhetoric

CHAPTER TWO

PARTNERSHIP IN THE MAKING

The central theme of this study is the concept of partnership between parents, teachers and children. In the field of home-school relations, a variety of definitions of partnership has emerged. As a consequence, the idea of partnership has come to mean a mixture of things: from compensation for parental inadequacies to an emphasis on parents' strengths and parental rights. In this research, I have focused specifically on a definition of partnership which has been employed, in recent years, by a number of institutions. These include: the National Children's Bureau (N.C.B.); the Community Education Development Centre (C.E.D.C.); and the School of Education at the University of Nottingham. These institutions have emphasised that partnership should be based on a sharing of knowledge, resources and power between parents and teachers. These principles, it has been argued, offer "the building blocks" for partnership (Wolfenden 1989).

This thesis focuses on the contrast between the rhetoric of partnership and the reality of parental involvement. In this chapter I will explore the assumptions which underpin the rhetoric of partnership. I will also look at the gaps in existing literature on the reality of

parental involvement in schools. However, I begin this chapter by focusing on the different definitions of partnership which have developed in the last four decades.

The changing definition of partnership

Bastiani has pointed out that the notion of parent-teacher partnership lies at the heart of current concerns about home-school relations. He argues:

> Such slogans often form the cornerstone in the rhetoric of very different campaigns, seductively inviting approval and consensus. But rigorous analysis and the collection of evidence often tell a very different story! For such notions, which characterise the rhetoric of different ideologies in home-school fields, generally turn out to be extremely elusive and highly problematic. This makes their close examination an essential task for almost all forms of study and inquiry which focus upon the relationship between families and school. (Bastiani:1987:p105)

I want to begin by outlining how different observers in the field of home-school relations have employed the notion of partnership as part of the rhetoric. The models of partnership which have resulted include: compensation, communication, accountability and participation.

Partnership as Compensation

The 1950's and 1960's saw a series of reports which looked at the effectiveness of the educational system (Early Learning 1954, Crowther Report 1959, Newsom Report 1963). This was part of the general appraisal of the newly formed welfare state. These reports highlighted that working class children were not receiving the same gains, as their middle class counterparts, from state education. Both the Crowther Report, which spoke of the need for all children to benefit from education beyond fifteen, and the Newsom Report, on the progress of children with average or below average abilities, emphasized the influence of economic and social factors on children's education.

However, studies at the time suggested that low educational performance was related to the influence of family background rather than economic and social factors or the nature of the schooling. Floud at al (1956), investigating the influence of home environment on working class children's success in obtaining grammar school places, developed the concept of 'favourable and unfavourable working class homes'. The research considered both the material and cultural environments of the home. Their findings indicated that the cultural environment, expressed in terms of parental education, attitudes and ambitions for their children, had the greatest influence on the educational opportunity of

working class children. Similarly, Douglas' classic study Home and School (1964) demonstrated that parental encouragement was the single most important factor in children's educational performance.

By the end of the 1960's research, which had originally set out to monitor post-war reconstruction and the redistribution of resources, began to focus on working class culture and its supposed deficiencies. Researchers turned to the 'unfavourable working class home' and looked for the causes of its deficiencies in: the attitudes of parents to their children's education (Floud et al 1956, Fraser 1959, Douglas 1964); 'inadequate' mother-child relationships (Newsom 1965); and the notion that such working class children were suffering from 'cultural deprivation' (Riessman 1962). These research findings established the existence of a relationship between the culture of the home and educational performance. It was the Plowden Report (1967), however, which ensured a major reorientation of focus. Parental interest in their children's education and its relation to academic achievement became a central research issue.

The Plowden Report

This report attempted to promote the need for 'good' primary education and focused particularly on the 'deprived' child. Rather than looking at the material and financial effects on the provision of education it turned

to cultural barriers. Thus, although home circumstances and the provisions for schooling were taken into account as possible influences on the educational performance of a child, parental attitudes were seen as paramount. As Plowden's well known conclusion indicates:

> Before the inquiry it was plain...that parental encouragement and support would take the child some way. What the inquiry has shown is that 'some way' can be interpreted as 'a long way', and the variations in parental encouragement and support has much greater effect than either the variations in home circumstances or variations in schools....if the least cooperative parent rose to the level of the most cooperative, the effect would be much larger than if the worst schools rose to the level of the best or least prosperous parents to the level of the most prosperous. (Plowden:1967:p181)

The claims of the Plowden Report have received much criticism (Bernstein and Davies 1969:Acland 1980) yet they continue to affect the way in which parent-teacher relations are viewed. Parental interests was identified as crucial to children's educational performance. The need to ensure parental cooperation, through a new partnership between parents and teachers, came to be seen as essential:

> The national survey pointed to the influence upon educational performance of parental attitudes. It follows that one of the essentials for educational advance is the close partnership between the two parties in every child's education.
> (Plowden:1967:p37)

The report proposed that teachers harness the educational influence of parents and steer it in a way felt to be beneficial to the education of the child.

There have subsequently been numerous criticisms of the report's assumptions about working class parents' interest in, and attitudes towards, their children's education. Researchers have argued it is wrong to conclude that parents are not interested in their children's education simply because they do not attend their children's school (Jackson and Marsden 1962; Tizard et al 1981; Midwinter 1977; Wolfendale 1989). Indeed, some writers have pointed out that the education which parents are interested in cannot be seen as a constant (Sharp and Green 1975: Sharpe 1979).

Partnership between parents and teachers was proposed by Plowden as a means of achieving an equality of opportunity for all children, by compensating for the inadequacies of parents. To ensure parental co-operation in this partnership Plowden, and others, argued for improvements in communication.

Partnership as communication

The communications model was based on the assumption that strategies adopted by schools to improve communications with parents would lead to more favourable home-school relations.

The Plowden Report set out a minimum programme which a school should follow in order to develop 'good' home-school relations. The report used examples from a number of schools which had been recommended to the committee by H.M.I. as having "outstandingly good relationships with parents". These examples of 'good practice' were issued in a separate publication by the D.E.S. (1968). Thus began a whole series of studies/reviews in the 1960s and 1970s which were full of ways in which schools could forge links with home. For example, Midwinter's book Education for Sale (1977), that arose from his involvement in the Educational Priority Area (E.P.A.) projects, placed the onus on the teacher: to convey information; to change parents' attitudes; and thus improve the child's academic performance. It was felt that if parents were better informed and were given a welcome in the school, then they would be more likely to cooperate (Plowden 1967).

This was part of the 'strategist approach' (Torkington 1986). As Torkington observes:

> Somehow it was felt that teachers were now convinced that good home/school relationships had an important part to play in a child's achievements and that all that teachers needed were ideas and examples of good effective practice. (Torkington: 1986: p15)

The effectiveness of the strategist approach for securing improved communications and relations between home and school has been questioned. (Torkington 1986). Others, such as John Rennie, remain convinced that it is simply a question of adopting the 'right' strategies. He notes teachers complain that they, 'never get the parents they want'. He goes on to argue, "Sadly, a not infrequent reason for this is the poor means of communications used by school" (Rennie:1980:p1). He recommends strategies to improve communications: friendly atmosphere, timing of events, the timing and nature of letters. This is typical of researchers and practitioners who have responded to the problems identified by teachers, such as the low response of parents, and have focused on how to make an event attractive to parents. As Sharpe points out:

> The research problem becomes centred again on school policy, the problem of why certain parents do not attend certain events. (Sharpe: 1979:p13)

Parental 'apathy' has continued to be explained in terms of communications problems (Taylor Report 1977). Yet certain assumptions about parents underpin this type of analysis. To begin with, researchers all too often assume that parents involved in a particular event hold common definitions about their participation in it. For example,

parents who attend school fairs do so in order to show their support for the school. Research has not attempted to discover from the parents why they did or did not attend events (Sharpe 1979).

Secondly, researchers assumed that once parents had been given information they would take this on board and change their behaviour and attitudes accordingly.[1] It is clear that in the communications model of partnership, what knowledge is passed on to parents and how this is done, is seen as unproblematic.

In the communications model of partnership, the focus was on the establishment of relationships and the process of conveying information within a school. In the accountability model of partnership, however, emphasis is often placed on conveying information to parents as a right and not as a means of achieving preferred relationships.

Partnership as accountablity

As Lallo (1979) notes, many writers have made the connection between accountability and partnership. The implication being that if two parties work closely with each other then they should also be answerable to one another.

Moves towards making schools more responsive to industry, and particularly to make them accountable to the public and the government, were initiated by Prime Minister James Callaghan. Callaghan was aware that he was tampering with the balance which had been established between public control and the rights of those working within schools to exercise expertise (Kogan 1986). Callaghan noted, in his speech to Ruskin College, the hostility of 'some people' to the idea of a Prime Minister intervening in the educational debate. He argued:

> It is almost as though some people would wish that the subject matter and the purpose of education should not have public attention focused on it; or at any rate, that profane hands should not be allowed to touch it (Callaghan:1976).

His criticisms of the standards of attainment of school leavers and the vocational preparation they received led him to recommend a partnership between schools and communities:

> It is an essential ingredient of this partnership that schools should be accountable to the local educational authority - and those that elect it, as part of the public system of education; accountable through the school governors and managers to the local community that they serve.(D.E.S.:1977:para 10:3)

In his speech Callaghan made the link between partnership and the need for accountability. Parents, alongside industrialists and other members of a school's

'community', were defined as external audiences in education who were to be informed and consulted.

In a sense, then, the present Conservative Government's Educational Reform Act is a belated product of the Great Debate on education initiated by Mr. Callaghan. Under successive Conservative governments of the 1980s, educational legislation has been passed under the auspices of improving schools' accountability to parents so that they: respond to perceived parental concerns about educational standards; ensure that parents are better informed; and improve parental choice in education.

The Education Act 1980 extended parental rights and access to educational processes. All state schools were to have an elected parent representative on the governing body. Parents had a right to express a preference regarding the school they wished their child to attend. Local Education Authorities (L.E.A.s) were compelled to publish information regarding a school's rules regarding admissions. The Education (No.2) Act 1986 increased parental representation on school governing boards. Furthermore, school governing bodies were required to produce an annual report for parents and organise a meeting to discuss the report. In their 1987 Election Manifesto the Conservatives argued, "We have already done much through the 1980 and 1986 Education Acts so that

parents can make their voice heard." (Conservative Party Election Manifesto:1987:p19).

Yet, parents were still seen to need more choice, choice which would, they argued, guarantee higher standards. Under the heading, 'Raising Standards in Education', the manifesto stated:

> Parents want schools to provide their children with the knowledge, training and character that will fit them for today's world. They want them to be taught the basic skills. They want schools that encourage moral values: honesty, hard work and responsibility. And they should have the right to choose those schools which do these things for their children. (Conservative Manifesto:1987:p17)

By appealing to common concern about falling standards in education (Simon 1988), the Government introduced the National Curriculum to ensure that children between five to sixteen studied a basic range of subjects. In addition, national tests would, "tell a parent or a teacher what a child knows, is able to do and is able to understand" (Key:1988:p11). The publication of these exam results would allow parents to see the 'achievements' of schools and the Education Authority. Mr. Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education, argued, in the House of Commons during the second reading of the Education Reform Bill: "the point in all of this is that parents are entitled to know how their child is doing and how their school is doing" (Hansard:1987:p775). Exam results would, the Government believed, be vital in parents' decisions

over choice of schools. Exam results became the currency that the Conservative Government wanted parents to use when choosing schools. The debate was formed around the criteria parents should employ when choosing a school, based on the notion that parents were presently dissatisfied with their children's education.[2]

As part of their commitment to increasing parental choice in schools, legislation has been passed to allow open enrollment in schools which it was felt ,"would compel schools to respond to the views of parents" (Conservative Manifesto:1987:p19). Alongside this, the Government moved to provide a diversity of schools and thus increase choice. The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced City Technology Colleges and grant maintained schools. The latter were schools which could opt out of local authority control and be funded directly by the D.E.S. As Key Pointed out:

> The intention is to widen choice for many parents in the state maintained sector and thus improve standards in all schools. L.E.A.s which want to hold on to their school will therefore have a far greater incentive to respond too the wishes of parents (Key:1988:p12).

In practice, there is no clear definition of 'accountability'. The word has been used to refer to: cost effectiveness; providing a curriculum relevant to the needs of industry; and a responsibility to the needs of the public. It is useful here to outline two distinct

views on accountability and to highlight their differing conceptions of partnership.

The Government's use of the word accountability in education can be characterised as based on the theme of control. Elliott et al (1981) have pointed out that this form of accountability argues for greater public (state) control over decisions about school organisation, teaching methods, and curriculum. As we have seen, however, Conservative notions of accountability are also related to notions of consumerist control and the introduction of market forces. This apparent paradox within the Conservative policy to both increase state control in education (the National Curriculum) and the introduction of market forces (increasing the range of schools and parental ability to choose) is seen by Chitty (1989) to reflect two strands in the philosophy of the New Right. There is the conservative tendency, which attempts to restore social and political authority through out society, and the Liberal tendency which wants to move towards a free, open and more competitive economy. Control as a description of the Conservative notion of accountability is not in itself sufficient. As Kogan points out, "many accounts of accountability in education seem to assume that it is not possible to hold conflicting ideas in the mind at once." (Kogan:1986:p21) The Conservative educational policy includes accountability based on the notion of control (Elliott 1981) but it also employs a 'free market' (Kogan 1986)

model of accountability. In a sense, this latter model is rejecting the power and legitimacy of the wider political system preferring relationships between professionals and clients to be decided through the market mechanism.

These notions of accountability present in Conservative policy contrasts with the Taylor Committee who viewed school accountability in terms of responsiveness. Elliott argues this model:

> suggests that schools ought to be more self-accounting; generating and communicating information about themselves in the light of interests and concerns expressed by local audiences. (Elliott:1981:pxi)

In contrast to the present Conservative government, the Taylor Committee interpreted the Labour government's call for schools to be more responsive to 'public' demands as a need for schools to encourage more active participation by parents and the local community in school affairs. This was described as the 'new partnership' between schools and their local communities. It provided a more pluralistic version of accountability. The 'national needs' were not seen as a homogeneous whole (or indeed a reflection of individual consumers). Rather, emphasis was placed upon the different and even competing needs of the schools' community.

These two views of accountability provide a stark contrast. As Munn et al notes:

> The tension between advocacy for greater control of schooling on the one hand, and the advocacy of greater local participation in schooling on the other hand runs throughout accountability rhetoric. (Munn et al:1982:p1)

Indeed, Munn has argued that attempts to force schools to become accountable to parents through providing more information have had negative effects on home-school relations:

> Information presented in a hothouse atmosphere of parents' rights implies that teachers and parents are at loggerheads over the education of children. It hardly promotes notions of partnership between home and school. Rather, it encourages teachers to seek refuge in their professional expertise as a means of safe-guarding their autonomy and this inhibits communication. (Munn:1985:p108)

Elliott, however, argues that teachers are likely to be more responsive to parents if they are relatively free from external control. This raises the policy issue of whether formal methods are needed to ensure accountability or whether they spoil good feelings between parents and teachers. More generally this is an issue of the balance between public accountablity and professional freedom. For some, such issues are resolved by a move towards a more collaborative relationship between parents and teachers (Taylor Report 1977: Sallis 1979) where accountability implies involving parents. This emphasis is central to the final definition of partnership.

Partnership as participation

Participatory partnership, a concept forwarded by such organisations as the C.E.D.C., the N.C.B. and the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, embraces the idea of mutual accountability of parents and teachers. In this definition of partnership, parents and teachers share: responsibility; expertise and knowledge; resources and skills; and power. The realisation of such a definition of parent-teacher partnership is premised on the acceptance by professionals that: parents have equivalent skills and expertise to offer; that parents are able to contribute to, as well as receive, services (Pugh 1985; Wolfendale 1989). In participatory partnership emphasis is placed upon co-operation between parents and teachers and the negotiation of their complimentary roles.

I want to begin by looking at how the model of participatory partnership was developed by the National Children's Bureau (N.C.B.), the School of Education at the University of Nottingham and the Community Education Development Centre (C.E.D.C.).

The National Children's Bureau

From the early 1980s, the N.C.B were at the forefront of promoting discussion on the idea of partnership between parents and professionals. In 1983 Wolfendale wrote,

"What has been lacking has been an overall theory of parental participation." (Wolfendale:1983:p10). In response, the National Children's Bureau published a series of 'Partnership Papers' which looked at how services for children and families were provided and questioned whether the provision was based on partnership between parents and professionals. These papers were important as the authors outlined their definition of participatory partnership. In 1986 they carried out a three year study which looked at relationships between parents and professionals in pre-school services. The aim was: to explore the extent of partnership; to identify and examine initiatives in which a working partnership had been achieved; and to disseminate information on, and promote discussion of, parent-professional partnership. (Wolfendale 1989).

The School of Education at the University of Nottingham

The 'Development of effective home-school programmes' project has been based at the School of Education at the University of Nottingham since 1976. This project has also been at the forefront of developing the participatory perspective on partnership. The project has sought to develop a programme of research and development work, teaching and studying. Great emphasis has also been given to in-service work with parents and teachers. The basic philosophy behind their work is:

> There can only be fundamental improvement in home-school relations when schools are able to identify parental need, wishes and experiences and are willing to respond to them in a spirit of partnership. (Bastiani:1989:p3)

"Listening to parents" has become the cornerstone of their home and school philosophy. Members of this project, like those of the N.C.B and C.E.D.C., acknowledged how important parents were as a resource in children's education. Change is seen to be initiated by teachers acknowledging the value of parents and listening to their views. At the same time, project members have also pointed to the inadequacies of teacher training in equipping teachers with the skills to work with parents. They have argued that the tendency had been to assume that teachers would develop these skills 'naturally'!

The Community Education Development Centre

In the mid 1980s some of the members of the C.E.D.C., particularly Kate Torkington (the Head of the Family Education Unit), began to inquire into the progress that had been made nationally, by primary schools, in establishing home-school relations as a priority. The gloomy conclusions of the inquiry led Torkington to argue for a 'parent centred' approach to parent-teacher relations. Like the other organisations, C.E.D.C.'s approach recognised the vital importance of acknowledging parental knowledge and skills if 'partnership' was to be realised.

Participatory partnership is a departure from previous ideologies surrounding the idea of parent-teacher relationships. It stands in stark contrast to the compensatory perspective where partnership was offered as a way of amending deficiencies in the home background.

The compensatory view of parent-teacher relationships adopted an exceptionalist framework (Ryan 1976). That is to say, the problem was perceived as exclusive to relationships between working class parents and teachers. The solution was to change working class parents. Participatory partnership, however, has moved the focus to parent-teacher relationships per se. Research has indicated that there are fundamental problems in all parent-teacher relations, challenging the idea that relationships between middle class parents and teachers are not problematic (Atkin et al 1988). This, then, is a move away from an exceptionalist to a universalist view of parent-teacher relationships. As Torkington notes:

> It is possible that the evidence of the 1960s and 70s was too closely linked to issues of social class resulting in programmes of positive discrimination aimed at the most disadvantaged children and therefore, missing the point that good home/school relationships are important for all children. (Torkington: 1986:p2)

In the next statement, Torkington takes this universalist approach to parent-teacher partnership to its logical conclusion. In reference to ethnic minority parents she argues:

> Whoever the parents are, the principles underpining home-school relationships are the same. Until these principles have been examined, the attitudes and values which sustain them have been internalised, and the appropriate skills developed, it is pointless to try and develop strategies peculiar to one particular social and ethnic group. (Torkington:1985:piv)

Here, Torkington is outlining the need for universal appraisal of parent-teacher relationships and a rejection of the exceptionalist approach to parent-teacher relations.

Having outlined the origins and the overview of the participatory perspective on partnership, I will now take a closer look at the principles, which the N.C.B. and C.E.D.C. have argued, should be universally applied in parent-teacher partnership.

Resources

In participatory partnership, parents are regarded as a potential resource in their children's education:

> This kind of parental involvement is not seen as compensation, a term that implies inadequacies in the home culture, but rather as an approach to learning that places value on all resources available to a child, including the home. (Filkin:1984:p76)

The principle of parents and teachers pooling their resources is echoed by other writers on partnership:

> The basic principle, I believe, behind a true partnership is a sharing. A sharing of knowledge, of power, of resources, of information, of experiences, of decision-making. Partners are different but equal. (De'ath:1982:p82)

Parents, then, are not simply a resource, they have knowledge and expertise to share with teachers.

Knowledge

Parents are seen to have vital knowledge about their children. Writers who hold the participatory perspective on partnership have stressed the importance and value of this knowledge. Parental knowledge becomes part of the two-way exchange between parents and teachers. This is what Kate Torkington has referred to as "the parent-centred approach" to involving parents in school:

> The rationale for the parent centred approach is that parents' knowledge of their individual children is far greater than that of a teacher and that the teachers' knowledge and skills about children and learning in general, should merely complement and build onto the specific knowledge that parents hold - both these aspects are equal and essential for learning to take place. (Torkington:1986:p14)

For Torkington, the starting point is not the sharing of knowledge between parents and teachers which is the emphasis in the N.C.B. definitions. She seems to be suggesting that parental knowledge is the starting point, the foundations on which teachers must build.

However, implicit in all these definitions are the concepts of reciprocity, sharing and equality. As Mitter argues:

> Partnership involves a full sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences. A commitment to partnership rests on the assumption that children will learn and develop better if parents and professionals are working together on the basis of equality than if either is working in isolation.(Mitter:1987:p108)

Participatory partnership is not about compensating for parents' inadequacies, employing strategies to improve communications or increasing parental power to control the decisions made in school. Parents are seen as an integral part of the educational process but this, however, raises questions about the relationship between parents and teachers.

Power

The move towards equality in the participatory perspective of partnership, implies realigning relationships between parents and teachers. This has led to the notion of using information and knowledge to empower parents and as part of this process, Torkington and others have called on teachers to review their notion of professionalism.

In effect, this has led to demands that teachers develop their role from that of expert, and holders of knowledge,

to a role where they work in collaboration with parents, facilitating the education of children. As Torkington suggests, this requires the assessment of power relationships between parents and teachers. How willing will teachers be to relinquish their power? Can parents and teachers negotiate new roles? As I have discussed below, these questions raise the fundamental issue: what is the nature of parent-teacher relationships?[3] Essentially, participatory partnership is based on the assumption that parents and teachers are able to negotiate new and equal roles for themselves.

Having outlined the participatory perspective on partnership, the rest of this chapter will explore the assumptions made about individual partners in the principles and beliefs of the participatory model of partnership. At the same time I will look at the existing research and literature on the reality of parental involvement.

The starting point must be to ask: who are the partners? Research has focused, overwhelmingly, on teachers and parents as a general group. Where distinctions have been made between parents it has tended to be along class lines. In this study I will not overlook the fact that nursery nurses, as well as teachers, work with parents. Secondly, I will not treat parents as a homogeneous group rather I acknowledge effects of race and gender on parents' experience. Finally, I will not ignore the third

party in the partnership, as first outlined by Plowden, the child.

Teachers

Accounts of teachers and parental involvement have tended to focus upon issues of professionalism and professional control. Teachers are seen to decide whether parental involvement initiatives are pursued and their professional autonomy is seen to play a key role in their decision. Is it this simple? The literature leaves us in no doubt that parental involvement raises a number of doubts, fears and conflicts for teachers.

Working conditions

Increasing demands are being made of teachers which may limit the profession's willingness and ability to pursue parental involvement. As we enter into the new E.R.A. (Education Reform Act) the demands of the national curriculum and the local management of schools are all placing increasing strains upon staff. This is indicated in the number of accounts of the increasing level of stress being suffered by teachers and heads as a result of their work.[4] Given the increased pressures teachers face, do parents represent an additional burden? According to Cyster they do:

> Teachers rightly perceive parents as an additional and avoidable complication in an already demanding professional life.(Cyster et al:1979:p150)

In Cyster et al's study of primary schools, there are two key words which emerge out of teachers' experiences of parental involvement: parents are seen as both **additional** and **avoidable**. This raises two questions. If parents are seen as an additional demand on teachers' work where are parents seen to fit into their existing job? Secondly, if parental involvement is seen as avoidable can we infer that teachers have the ultimate control over how, or indeed whether, parents can be involved in their children's education? In short, how do issues of teachers' control and autonomy relate to their experiences of parental involvement?

Parental involvement and the teacher's job

A number of studies have recorded the effects of limited resources on the experience of parental involvement for teachers. Tizard et al argues that part of the 'problem' of parental involvement for teachers is organisation of their time and attention when parents are in the classroom. Teachers are torn between the claims parents and children make on their time. Cyster et al's study confirms this. They argue that many teachers were worried the demands being made on their time by parents was unjustifiably impinging on the education of the children. Cyster et al concluded,

> Many teachers still find it difficult to judge how much time should be spent in advising parents, time which might be put to better use in educating their children. The resolution of these parental conflicts must surely be a matter of concern for educational decision-making at all levels. (Cyster et al:1979:p109)

This conflict, and the issues it raises, has not been a concern for research. To begin with we need to question: do all teachers experience parental presence in class in terms of a conflict in demands between parents and children? What sorts of demands are parents making when such conflicts arise and in what circumstances? How do teachers cope with, and resolve, these conflicts?

Tizard et al hints that these conflicts are more than just competing demands. The conflicts experienced by some teachers raise questions about their very role in the process:

> Generally, a teacher's role is seen as working with children, work with parents, although paid lip service to by authorities, is rarely given priority either in teacher training or in subsequent assessments of the teacher's work...she [the teacher] is likely to feel not only role conflict, but guilt, if she devotes much of her time to parents. (Tizard et al et al:1981:p99)

Parental involvement is not simply a conflict of time which teachers learn to resolve. Involvement also raises questions about the role of teachers. We need to address questions such as: Where do parents fit into the

teachers' job? What factors bear in the accommodations teachers make?

Partnership is said to involve a sharing of resources. Yet researchers have emphasised teachers' experiences of parents as an encroachment on their resources, particularly time and space. When parents are seen to provide additional resources this is also not with its problems. In times of staff cut backs and shortages the teachers' unions have been vigilant in safe guarding teachers' jobs and have expressed fear that parents may be used to compensate for inadequate resources. "Parents and other volunteers should not be used to compensate for deficiencies in essential basic provision" (N.U.T.:1987:p5). Parents as helpers raises questions not only about teachers' job security but also their professional status.

Professionalism

How do teacher's experience the processes which underpin parent-teacher interactions? Researchers have been accused of uncritically adopting teachers' viewpoints on parent-teacher relationships (Sharp and Green 1975: Sharpe 1979). Parental behaviour becomes the problem, while getting parents into school, and securing their understanding, becomes the research issue. Where teachers' reactions to parental involvement has been analyzed it has tended to be seen in terms of teachers'

'professionalism'. Teachers are felt to be fearful of parents' involvement because it threatens their 'expertise'. The effects of 'professionalism' has led a number of organizations to call for a rethinking of the relationship between parents and teachers (C.E.D.C., the National Children's Bureau, the School of Education at the University of Nottingham).

Advocates of participatory forms of partnership have highlighted the constraints of teachers' professionalism on their ability to realise partnership based on equality. The following statement from a Head Teacher, in Cyster et al's study, indicates how the desire of teachers to maintain professional/lay boundaries obstruct attempts to promote equitable relations between home and school:

> I've heard of head teachers running classes for parents but if we want a profession, then we have to behave like a profession and you can't teach parents to be teachers in three lessons after four pm. We've shouted for long enough that teachers must be properly trained and then we cut the ground from under our feet by bringing Mrs So and so, nice lady from along the road, who can do the job as well as anybody else. (Cyster et al:1979:p84)

Some teachers are keen to preserve their claim to expertise and skill. The 1988/9 debates surrounding the introduction of licensed teachers into classrooms provides evidence of this. Part and parcel of teachers' claims to specialised skill and expertise has been their emphasis on the distinction between professionals and non

professionals in schools. This distinction is explicitly used in the N.U.T's publication, Pupils, Teachers and Parents (1987), in which the NUT state their first principle of parental involvement:

> The N.U.T. assert that the teacher has a professional role which can not be fulfilled by non-professionals. Professionalism requires good communications with parents, especially where joint decisions have to be made. (N.U.T.: 1987:p5)

Writers (eg. Halsey 1975 :Midwinter 1977) have been aware of teachers' fears that parents are a threat to their professionalism, expertise and control. Supporters of parental involvement in the past have at times been keen to outline the difference between parents and teachers. Both Halsey and Midwinter set out to reassure teachers that:

> The parents role in the classroom is more like the child's than like the teachers. (Halsey:1975:p22)

> At least initially, we should.... view parents as being in a learner capacity, learning, with and alongside the child, how to obtain the best from educational opportunities. (Midwinter: 1977:p15)

In order that teachers should not fear that parents were "diluting the profession", Midwinter went on to reassure that, "if informing parents is the main aim, then the teachers retain their professional expertise" (Midwinter:1977:p15).

Teachers were told they could maintain their expertise if parents were placed in the role of learner. Similarly, teachers writing at that time (the 1970's) indicated their professional status would be maintained if they gave parents only the mundane aspects of their job to carry out.

> It seems to me that our professional status lies not so much in the day-to-day detail of what we do, but in our case planning and responsibility for things like attainment testing and maintaining progress. The teacher who is seen as a theoretician - a curriculum planner, for example, has his professionalism enhanced rather than threatened, if some detail of his job is removed from him.(Haigh:1975:p82)

For Haigh, teachers' professional expertise lay in their decision-making role.[5] They were 'safe' as long as they did not 'give way' on this aspect of the job. Whilst such writers have been keen to emphasise the differences between parents and professionals, and outline areas of professional expertise; others have emphasised the need to break down the boundaries between parents and teachers. Such writers argue that the partnership between parents and teachers should be based on reciprocity: mutual involvement, mutual accountability and mutual gain. (Torkington 1986: Pugh 1986: De'ath 1982: Mitter 1987; Wolfendale 1983). Parent's knowledge of their children, and the contribution they can make to their children's education, should be recognised and this should be reflected in the status and power given to parents. Essential to the development of such a

partnership is the redressing of the relationship between professionals and the lay person. This involves the teachers' role developing from expert to facilitator, where teachers work in collaboration with parents.

What questions are raised by seeing the nature of parent-teacher relationships in terms of the effects of teachers' professionalism? Do all teachers employ a professional perspective in every circumstance in which they encounter parents? I would suggest that 'professionalism' has no fixed meaning for teachers but derives its sense from the circumstances in which it is used. Is it not better to look at teachers' use of the term 'professionalism'? Specifically, we need to examine the circumstances in which teachers justify their actions in terms of their professional identity. What features of their job do teachers appeal to in order to justify their identity as a profession to parents?

Nursery nurses

A great proportion of the literature written on parental involvement in schools has focused on nursery schools. Some have argued that the more informal surroundings, which characterise work with under fives, is an ideal environment for encouraging parental involvement (Wolfendale 1983). Yet researchers have often neglected one of the partners to be found in nursery classrooms -

namely the nursery nurse. Classic texts on home-school relations such as Tizard et al's book, Involving Parents in Nursery and Infant Schools (Tizard et al 1981) have failed to explored nursery nurses' experiences of parental involvement. Indeed, in their account of parental involvement, nursery assistants are only mentioned in passing, that is when they are left to run the classroom while the teachers organise meetings with the parents to exchange views.

Nursery nurses also work with parents. What are their experiences? Can we assume that the occupational identities of nursery nurses' and teachers' engender the same issues in their work with parents? To begin with, the nature of teachers' and nursery nurses' work differs along with the degree of control they exercise over their work situation.

Clift et al (1980) carried out a study on the aims, roles and deployment of staff in forty nurseries. In their observational work they assessed in what way and to what degree, deployment of teachers and nursery nurses differed. They concluded:

> Teachers as a group spent more time on involvement, supervision, adult talk, conversation with children and administration, whereas assistants as a group spent marginally more time on dealing with equipment, care and welfare, and passive supervision and much more on housework. (Clift et al:1980:p57)

Where such differences exist in the nature of their work and their control of their work situation, there will be obvious implications for their experiences and responses to parental involvement. Do nursery nurses' experiences contrast with nursery teachers?

Some researchers (Watt 1977: Ward 1982) have argued that nursery nurses feel threatened by parental involvement in education. The insecurities which nursery nurses already feel about their job has been well documented in the literature. Given their low pay and lack of career structure nursery nurses, it is argued, see parents as an added threat to their already low status.

> The only real opposition (to parents helping in child-related activities) came from a small number of nursery nurses who appeared to see the intrusion of parents in this role as a threat to themselves and their own function in relation to the children, "It's not fair to them or us, this is part of our job."(Watt: 1977:p40)

Patricia Ward's study of nursery education revealed similar insecurities amongst nursery nurses.

> Nursery assistants seemed to favour parental involvement in areas which do not impinge on their own domain. (Ward:1982:p133)

In Ward's survey of the staff in a number of nurseries in Avon, she inquired if the staff would be willing/unwilling for parents to participate in discussing, suggesting and helping staff with projects

for the children. 53% of the teachers said they would be willing for parents to participate in this way compared to 37% of the nursery nurses.

Other studies have highlighted the effects of the insecurities felt by all nursery staff about their position and status vis-a-vis the rest of the primary sector. Heaslip (1985) in his study of the training experiences of nursery staff pointed that all staff felt the status of nursery education was low. This perceived low status of the nursery could explain why Watt's discovered that both nursery nurses and nursery teachers were opposed to parents being involved in school management. Are we to conclude that all staff in the nursery sector share similar views on parental involvement because of the way that they feel they are regarded within primary education? [6]

Research presents a confusing picture. On the one hand, teachers and nursery nurses are portrayed as sharing similar views on parents. Thus reflecting their joint perceptions of the low status accorded to work in nursery classes. On the other hand, the views of nursery teachers and nurses have been contrasted, emphasising the greater reserve of nursery nurses towards involving parents. It is clear that nursery nurses are one partner in home-school relations whose experiences have tended to be overlooked. We cannot assume their experiences of parental involvement is the same as nursery teachers. We

need to question how the rhetoric which surrounds partnership applies to them.

Parents

Parents' knowledge and resources

Studies in the nineteen fifties and sixties focused on the 'deficiencies' of the working class environment, and the influence of parents' attitudes and interest in the academic achievements of their children. There were, however, studies at the time which looked at the effects parental knowledge and resources had on children's educational performance. Jackson and Marsden's (1962) central thesis argued that working class parents had insufficient information about education and lacked the skills to intervene in their children's education at school or home.

These findings were echoed in Lacey's account of working class children in grammar schools. When writing about the cultural resources available to the families he commented:

> As it was, these resources consisted largely of the mother's willingness to help and encourage her children. She lacked the self-confidence and understanding necessary to visit the school or call on outside help: although orientated towards educational achievement, she was not part of an educated sub-culture.(Lacey:1970: p149)

These studies seemed to imply that the difference between working and middle class parents was the resources and information available to them. If the working class parents were given more information, they too would be able to co-operate like middle class parents.

Moves to involve parents do not 'appear' to have overcome these problems of conveying information to parents. More recently, studies have indicated that parental participation does not automatically lead to increase in parents' knowledge. Jackie Goode's account of her experiences in a classroom revealed how very little opportunity there was to learn and observe classroom life:

> As a helper in the group I was kept very busy - threading needles, cutting out, untangling stitches. There was little time to look at the classroom as a whole, or really be aware of what the teachers and other children were doing. In the context of being seen as a helper this seems legitimate. However, if the purpose was to increase parental understanding of the classroom and children's learning, then it would not have been achieved in this situation. (Goode:1982:p98)

Goode feels that a fundamental goal of involving parents is to ensure that they gain an 'understanding' of what happens in the school. This is echoed by others:

> Parents can be helped to **understand** what the school is trying to do for their child by actively supporting the school and staying with their child until the adjustment between home and school seems to be satisfactorily achieved. (Parry and Archer:1974:p12)

and

> (parental involvement in classrooms is about)....raising parental **understanding** of the ways in which children learn and their appreciation of what the nursery is doing for their children, thus increasing the support which they can give to their children and the school and thereby assisting the children's educational progress. (D.E.S.:1975:p54)

As Tizard et al note, "Most who advocate parental involvement stress that at the heart of the matter is the need for parents to understand what school is doing and why" (Tizard et al:1981:p65). The participatory partnership calls for a two-way exchange of knowledge between parents and teachers. However, researchers have tended to look at the knowledge that teachers share and parents gain. Thus the focus is on knowledge which would increase parents' understanding of both the teaching methods employed in the school and the aims teachers are working for.

Tizard et al's study of parental involvement in nursery and infant classrooms specifically set out to record whether teachers' and mothers' understandings of the purpose of play materials matched. Had the mothers understood? Evidence indicated that (with the exception of parents from the more middle class schools) most of the parents, after the first year of implementing parental involvement initiatives, did not know why the materials were provided. This is an example of an

evaluation approach which is common in research on parental involvement. The starting point of the study is the researchers' and the teachers' views of the aims of involving parents. Such studies overlook the criteria parents employ to make sense of their own experiences of their involvement or indeed other criteria which teachers may develop as their experiences of parental involvement increases. In short, such research lacks a dynamic, ignoring the establishment and development of a relationship between parents, teachers and children which affects how they come to see and value parental involvement.

The second issue left unanswered by these studies is whether parents feel they have increased their knowledge? In other words, what criteria of knowledgeability and understanding do they employ?

For Sharp and Green, it was important that parents present themselves as knowledgeable about school methods (although when questioned the parents only had a vague idea about the schools' methods). Sharp and Green began to uncover how teachers and parents manage the impressions they give to each other about their knowledge and understanding of the school. They also pointed out in their study, the varying source from which parents' knowledge of the school could stem, for example, second-hand information, open evenings, products brought home from school and the mass media. Sharp and Green though

are in danger of treating all the parents as the same. Could it be that different parents have access to different sources of information which would mean access to a different types of knowledge and, ultimately, different ways of seeing the school?

Atkin et al's study Listening to Parents (1988) gives some indication that the parents' position within the school affects the kind of knowledge which the parents have access to. They argue that 'familiar' parents have access to the working life of the school which does not inevitably include an understanding of educational matters.[7] From this this access point parents develop a personal accounting system which they use to explain behaviour and events. Such research indicates that the amount and kind of knowledge parents possess is dependant upon parents' experiences and their position within the school. Following from Sharp and Green's study, the nature and level of parental knowledge and understanding is not inevitably observable.

There are a number of questions raised here which my research has sought to address. What do parents want to know? What kinds of knowledge do they seek when they become involved? How do they employ both formal and informal resources available to them ? Is their knowledge influenced by: the context of their involvement; their own biographies? How does the kind of knowledge they acquire influence how they define the situations in

school? Researchers have failed to examine parents' experiences of their involvement, instead they have focused on evaluating parental experiences in terms of the goals and aims set out by the school. Thus, evaluation of parental understanding is seen as not problematic - when understanding means sharing teachers views. What are parents' own understandings? What do their experiences mean to them? Why do the teachers and parents talk of the benefits of informal contacts. What does such contact mean to the teachers and parents? To date such informal contact in the working life of the school has not been considered a valid area of study by researchers. This is another example of how researchers have in effect ignored areas which are of vital importance to participants because of the researcher's own preconceptions about what should happen when parents and teachers meet.

Partnership and Parents from Ethnic minorities

What effect does racial discrimination have on attempts to achieve equality between teachers and parents from ethnic groups? I will address this question by locating the involvement of parents from ethnic minorities within the context of race and education.

A major issue of concern to research on race and education has been the 'achievement' and

'underachievement' of children from ethnic minorities (Tomlinson 1984). The widest ranging survey of West Indian and Asian children's achievements was carried out for the Rampton Committee (1981) and, later, the Swann Committee (1985). The results indicated that Asian pupils were achieving similar results at 'O' and 'A' level as the indigenous population. This was explained in terms of the encouragement they received at home. Far from emphasising parents' lack of interest in school, the education of children has been seen to be a matter of great importance to Asian parents, particularly parents from India (Tomlinson 1984: Driver 1977). In recent research, Asian parents have been seen as holding high expectations regarding the future educational achievements of their children at school (Mac an Ghaill 1988). Researchers have recorded examples of teachers feeling that, "They ['Asian parents'] all want their bloody kids to be bloody brain surgeons" (Mac an Ghaill:1988:p63). However, Tomlinson has argued that there is little evidence of unrealistic expectations over children's choice of career (Tomlinson 1981).

Researchers have sought to challenge the assumptions and stereotypes of 'Asian' parents which has become current in both educational practice and research. Other researchers have pointed out the importance of not making generalisations about 'Asian' parents (Ghuman 1980:Ghuman and Gallop 1981). As Barker argues:

> To talk about Asians as a single category can be misleading and overlooks the existence of cultural sub-groups. (Barker:1978:p274)

Some researchers have sought to explore the views of different Asian groups (Punjabi Sikhs, Gugarati Hindus and Bangladesh Bengali Muslims) and have focused on the influence of the parent's own education and religious beliefs on their perceptions of their children's education.

Tomlinson argues that her study of West Indian and 'Asian' parents suggests:

> that while there is a potentiality for conflict and misunderstanding between parents and teachers, there is also scope for dialogue and improved understanding. (Tomlinson:1981:p17)

Again we return to the concept of understanding between parents and teachers. Tomlinson believes:

> Understanding the system proves difficult for non-indigenous parents, particularly if they are also handicapped by language difficulty, and if no special provision has been made to explain to them what schools are trying to achieve. (Tomlinson:1981:p17)

Again we are faced with the question of what kind of understandings schools want parents to achieve and the question is raised of the kinds of understandings parents seek and how they realise them.

More interesting questions are raised when we return to the notion of partnership between teachers and ethnic minority parents. Where cultural differences are emphasised in schools, which Ghuman and Gallop have argued should be a guiding concept in multi cultural situations, parents can come to be seen as both a resource and source of knowledge regarding their own culture. Researchers have pointed to the problems caused by teachers adopting an 'integrationist' view of pupils and parents from ethnic minorities (Ghuman and Gallop 1981; Tomlinson 1984). Such teachers felt that the 'problems' in relations between schools and minority parents would be solved if parents were, "More like us!" Tomlinson (1984) has argued that a Multi Cultural Education approach would place emphasis on the difference rather than the deficiencies of minority parents and so promote better relations. Minority parents would become a source of knowledge about their culture -but this raises further questions. How are ethnic minority parents used as a resource in schools? What knowledge do teachers seek from parents? Can we assume that a plurality of cultures will co-exist equally within a school? Or is it the case that we are overlooking the power relationships which exist between dominant and minority cultures (as well as between minority cultures) both in school and the wider society? What effect will these power relations have on the partnership between ethnic minority parents and teachers and the exchange of resources and knowledge?

I have highlighted the gap that exists in research on parental perceptions of their involvement, and particularly the questions that ethnicity raises regarding the rhetoric that surrounds that concept of participatory partnership. However, both the rhetoric surrounding partnership and the existing literature on home-school relations has overlooked the significance of the gender of parents on the experience of parental involvement. Here I will look at how the experience of mothers have been viewed in the literature on parental involvement. I will also explore how the principles of partnership apply to mothers.

Mothers

People who write about parental involvement often use the words 'parent' and 'mother' as if they were synonymous. Examples of this are readily available in classic texts on home-school relations. Tizard et al, under the heading 'Had the enthusiasm of parents continued?' writes, "We thought it was important to establish whether mothers still want to be involved in their children's education" (Tizard et al:1981:p84). Research which has sought to uncover the meanings of parents and teachers, overlook crucial insights which could be uncovered by looking at women's involvement as a separate issue. For example, Sharp and Green note that, "It was the mothers whom the teachers regarded as particularly educationally relevant"

(Sharp and Green:1975:p153). However, they fail to ask why this is so. Women's involvement in their children's education is assumed. It is seen as an extension of their role as mothers. This assumption has been adopted by researchers unquestioningly. In this section, I wish to look at some of these assumptions made in the literature and their relevance to the rhetoric of partnership.

Mothers as 'Resources'

Whilst in theory, partnership suggests that teachers should regard parents as resources, tapping into their skills and experiences, we need to question whether mothers have ever been seen as anything other than a resource? Haigh, who was a Head Teacher, points out:

> Many housewives are glad of an opportunity to get out of the house and to do something useful. It only seems sensible to make use of the situation in which someone else is ready and willing to do jobs which you yourself find irksome and frustrating - not through laziness but because such jobs interfere with what you are paid to do.(Haigh:1975:p79)

The 'situation' Haigh is inviting teachers to make use of is the sexual division of labour which leaves women isolated in the home with the responsibility of child care. Women's availability is taken for granted as an extension of their role as mothers.

Like Haigh, Midwinter also makes assumptions about women's involvement in their children's education. He

illustrates the position of 'parents' vis-a-vis teachers with an analogy between nursing and teaching. In an attempt to convince teachers that parental presence will not be a threat to their professional status he argued that nurses gained in professional status by giving mothers the **chores** of simple health care. He implies that the status of teachers will be enhanced if they, too, pass the 'chores' of teaching over to the mothers.

Both were writing in the mid 1970s when ideas of partnership with 'parents' implied parents participating in the classroom on teachers' terms. This does not negate the need to recognise the gender specific nature of parents' position in the classroom. Should we talk of revising 'parents' position in the classroom or more specifically the position of mothers?

The ideology of motherhood: the processes which underline involving mothers

Basil Bernstein argued, in his criticism of E.P.A.s, Education Cannot Compensate for Society. that working class parents must drop their working class identities when they enter the school in order to be accepted:

> The child is expected, and his [her] parents as well, to drop their social identity, their way of life and its symbolic representations, at the school gate. (Bernstein:1970:p345)

This is hardly the case when women enter the school as their children's mothers. Teachers will reinforce their identities or at least judge their performance in their role as mothers.

All calls to involve 'parents' carry with them some model of appropriate roles for mothers. For example, Plowden (1967) condemned working mothers when the question of entitlement to full-time places was raised. The report expressed fears that awarding a full-time place to mothers might encourage them into full-time work and stated emphatically, "It is not the business of the educational service to encourage these mothers to do so" (Plowden:1967:p127). Despite stating that they could not assume that mothers who worked did not care for their children, or that some children may not suffer from their mother's absence, they still concluded, "we consider that mothers who cannot satisfy the authorities that they have exceptionally good reasons for working should have low priority for full-time nursery for their children." (Plowden:1967:p127). The Plowden Report sought to establish the factors in a child's home environment which influenced their educational performance. In this analysis, a mother who was not working was seen to be a positive environmental factor. This reaction from the Committee is indicative of two schools of thought on child-care, which received recognition in the 1950s and 1960s, that held distinct assumptions about the roles of mothers.

First, the quality of mother-child interactions in the early years, was highlighted in the 1950s as a factor lying at the root cause of cultural deprivation. Children were seen to be linguistically or cognitively inadequate if they did not receive sufficient 'stimulation' in the home. Secondly, post Second World War child psychologists focused on the consequences of the early separation of children and mothers. Researchers began to argue that separation in this way led children to become delinquent and suffer from personality defects. The most famous proponent of this view was Bowlby (1953). He argued that a special bond existed between mother and child. Despite attacks on this myth of maternal deprivation, rooted as it is in the concept of 'motherhood', it has remained a powerful ideology.

As Smart (1984) has argued, the popularization of Bowlby's theories reflected the increasing identification of the family as a source of social stability in post-war Britain, in the face of increasing divorce and illegitimacy rates. This combined with an increasing number of social workers and health workers who accepted and disseminated such views. The response to ideas of maternal deprivation, and the apparent negative effects of working mothers, varied with social class (Adam 1975). Slater and Woodside's (1951) study of marriages amongst working class people indicted that couples were reluctant

to accept ideologies of child care bought to them by social workers and health visitors.

I would argue that the role expectations of women which are linked to the ideals of motherhood are an integral part of women's experiences of their involvement in school. As Pugh and De'ath (1984) argue, mothers are often made to feel that they are entirely responsible for the optimum development of their child. The increase in the parent's right to be involved in their children's education has led, in effect, to an increase in maternal duties where parental involvement is seen to be crucial in the child's educational success (David 1985). Involvement becomes proof that mothers are performing in their roles adequately and also as a means of improving their mothering skills.

Mothers' knowledge

For more than a hundred years, the concept of 'motherhood' has imbued both the practice and theory of primary education. Steedman (1988), analysing the last two centuries, argues that the teaching of young children has increasingly been linked to an understanding of 'motherhood'. Frobel, in the late nineteen century, argued that the ideal teacher is the 'mother made conscious'. Teachers throughout this century have been asked, in the Frobel tradition, to model themselves on a 'good mother' for the educational benefit of children.

(Particularly 'deprived' working class children.) Steedman argues that one of the sources for the idea of teachers modelling themselves on 'good mothers' developed from:

> translations, for the education market, of the natural, unforced education that nineteenth century observers saw as being imparted by the poor (preferably peasant) mothers to their children (Steedman:1988:p83).

Ironically, from the mid-twentieth century, mothers from the lower social classes were no longer seen to provide a model for educational practice. Indeed, it has been argued that the rise of 'expert opinions' (e.g. Bowlby 1953) reflected a particular childcare ideology which often contradicted working class women's own experiences (Graham 1977; Duxbury 1987).

The idea of mothers being inadequate educators has recently been challenged by the work of Tizard and Hughes in their study Young Children Learning (1984). This research illustrates that a child's intellectual and language needs are much more likely to be met in the home than in the nursery classroom. Conversations children held in class tended to be question-answer orientated rather than the dialogue researchers found between mothers and children at home. Mothers were able to use the experiences they shared with their children and the meaning that developed in the home, to understand their children's conversation. Like Frobel, almost a hundred

years earlier, Tizard and Hughes also concluded that teachers could learn a lot about the education of under fives by observing mother-child interactions.

If we start by looking at the existing knowledge of mothers this may challenge assumption about the 'education' which mothers need. Mayall (1990) notes:

> It is a tribute to the power of traditional thinking about women, and especially about mother's knowledge, that a countervailing trend receives so little recognition in the rhetoric of public debate and service provision. This is that, judged according to a number of indices, we have a population of women, and especially of mothers, whose educational level is high; compared with the early years of 1945 (to look no further back), women have more years of general education, where they have the opportunity to learn to think, to acquire knowledge and to criticise. (Mayall:p325:1990)

Thus, the general education which women receive and the expertise they develop as mothers should, as Mayall reminds us, "be more fully taken into account by those who, relying on traditional thinking, seek to modify mothers' beliefs and behaviour" (p325:1990).

Parental Involvement and Feminism

Analysis of parental involvement would seem to indicate that, as a policy, it is distinctly non-feminist because it reinforces women's oppression rather than challenges it. Parental involvement reconstructs women's position as economic dependants and primary carers of children and

takes for granted their willingness to help in their children's education. Parental involvement initiatives, through their compensatory nature, can make women feel inadequate, placing them in the position of learner and increasing their responsibilities for their children's academic future. How then do feminists respond? Naomi Eisenstadt, writing about parental involvement in the nursery sector, acknowledges that traditional services are in themselves very judgemental. Such services engender a feeling of guilt and inadequacy in their users and, particularly for low income women, feelings of powerlessness. But she goes on to argue:

> A partnership model of parental involvement, on the other hand, does not exploit women's feelings of guilt, but reinforces some notions of control.(Eisenstadt:1986:p94)

Thus, it can be argued, parental involvement which empowers women is inherently feminist.

> The feminist argument in favour of involving parents is valid only for schemes of parental involvement that give mothers some share of control and power. Involvement can be a means of personal growth and an enhancement of self-esteem. It provides women with a base for mutual support and ensures that service providers are sensitive to the needs of adults as well as those of children. (Eisenstadt: 1986:p103)

The partnership model of parental involvement, which is fundamentally participatory, is, according to Eisenstadt, essentially feminist. Since such a model involves the empowering of women and does not judge them in terms of

the ideals of motherhood. In practice, to what extent are women empowered through their involvement in their children's education? Perhaps our first question needs to be: how is power shared between mothers and fathers when they become involved in their children's education?

Patterns of male power

Miriam David in her book The State, the Family and Education (David 1980) looks at the sexual division of child care duties, particularly the state's interest in propagating the notion of motherhood, as part of the activities which are essential for the reproduction of the conditions of capitalism. She points to the exclusion of women from the labour market in the nineteenth century as the point in which parents' role, and parenting duties, began to be emphasised. Educational institutions played a fundamental role in reinforcing the duties of mothers and their position in the home. We must question the extent to which the movement towards greater parental involvement in schools is a continuation of this process.

How patterns of male power and female subordination relate to parental involvement in education is an interesting issue. Where do women have access to power in school? As David has noted: when women, as parents, do exercise power and influence in education it tends to be overlooked. She cites the example of the William Tyndale Junior School controversy over comprehensive schooling in

Thameside L.E.A.. While the events of Tyndale school are well researched David comments:

> The remarkable point, which has not been well documented elsewhere, was that the fight over standards, progressivism and indiscipline were initiated not by officials or school managers but by parents and most especially mothers concerned about their own child's schooling. (David:1980:p206)

It is important then that when we consider the distribution of power in school it is not simply between staff and parents but also between mothers and fathers. What access to power do women have as parents in schools? How do they use it?

How mothers experience parental involvement is not the only reality which has been ignored in both rhetoric and literature on home-school relations. Researchers have failed to look at children's own perceptions of parental involvement. Furthermore, the rhetoric which surrounds partnership has not provided an ideal account of children's place in the partnership. It is these issues which I will now review.

Children

Observers of home-school relations who have employed a partnership model have tended to overlook children's experiences of parental involvement. Children are seen to

benefit both from moves to compensate children for the inadequacies of their home background and steps towards making schools more accountable to parents. In the communications model of partnership, children are seen to play a vital role as the messenger between parents and teachers. Children's experiences have been overlooked. Even within the participatory model of partnership, children's participation in home-school relations is neglected. With this in mind, I will look at how children have been treated in research on parental involvement. What assumptions are being made about their experiences?

The Plowden report acknowledged, over two decades ago, that:

> At the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisition of new equipment, have their desired effects unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him. (Plowden: 1967:para 9)

Yet children's views on parental involvement have not received the same research attention as other parties in the partnership. As Cyster et al noted, "Children's opinions of whether or not they want their mums and dads at school are rarely sought" (Cyster et al:1979:p102).

The cause of this neglect of children's views is linked to the way children have been viewed in the literature on parental involvement. Sharpe argues that sociologists,

and ethnographers in particular, have highlighted that children are not passive objects, subject to the influence of the process of schooling. Instead, children are active participants in their own education. However, he notes:

> This insight is underdeveloped in the area of home-school relations where the emphasis has been placed on the child as a passive carrier of home influences. (Sharpe:1979:p18)

I argue that in parent-teacher relations three models of children have been employed: as beneficiaries, messengers, and mediators. Only in the latter model is an active role in home-school relations really given to children.

Children as beneficiaries

Literature on the compensatory, accountability and participatory models of partnership have presented children as alleged beneficiaries of parental involvement initiatives. The majority of research on children's experiences have recorded the effects of parental involvement initiatives on children's educational performance (Tizard et al 1980: Macleod 1985). Although some authors have been unwilling to conclude that recorded advances in children's achievements are a direct result of parental involvement initiatives (Young and McGreeny 1968). Researchers have pointed to other 'benefits' which result from parental involvement. For

example, improvements in children's behaviour (Green 1968) and the breaking down of the boundary between home and school (Midwinter 1977). This research has specifically focused on outcome rather than children's experiences of the processes of parental involvement.

Children as Messengers

Another way in which children's place in parental involvement has been characterised is in terms of their roles as messengers. References are made in the literature to the part that children play in conveying information about the school to parents. Lacey's study highlighted how working class parents were dependant on their children for information about grammar schools. In his study of Hightown Grammar School, Lacey looked at the ability of working class and middle class parents to intervene successfully in their child's school. Working class parents were seen to lack the skills and experiences needed to support their child:

> After a year or so at grammar school many working class parents were already largely dependant on their sons' interpretation of his position at school. (Lacey:1970:p151)

The ability of children to carry out this job of messenger has been questioned in a number of studies. Cyster et al state, "Parents generally learnt little from their children about school - but very little concerning the general everyday life of the classroom"

(Cyster et al:1979:p75). The messenger role which has been attributed to children in the literature reflects the researchers' view that children have a passive role to play in parent-teacher relationships.

Children become a shuttlecock passed back and forth between teachers and parents. Their position in relation to parents and teachers is labelled as problematic when they do not pass on information adequately. Researchers have failed to look at why children refuse to pass on letters to parents or to ask what do children think of parental involvement? How does it fit into their experiences of school? This gap in the research on parental involvement was noted over two decades ago by Lindsey:

> Even excluding extreme cases, successful communications between the two groups of adults will be subject to the quality of the child's relationship with them both; to his interpretation of the relevance of the contact to his interests and ambitions and its conformity with his self-image and his struggle towards adult status.(Lindsey:1961:p15)

In short, researchers have neglected to look at what parental involvement means to children.

Children as Mediators

Some research has been carried out which views children as active mediators in relations between parents and teachers. For Sharp and Green (1975), children are vital

in assisting parents to present a certain image to the teachers. Their study revealed that a teacher's definition of a good parent was someone who left the job of educating the child to the teacher. Given the segregation of role between parents and teachers in terms of space, time and visibility - parents were able to convey an image of 'good' parent to the teacher whilst continuing to teach their children to read at home. Sharp and Green argue that the onus, though, was upon the child not to gaffe, "My mum said I've got to do reading and writing everyday". Yet Sharp and Green, like Lacey before them, present parent and child as a team which excludes other forms of relationships between children and parents and teachers.

Sharpe, in his study of a secondary school, looked at the extent to which pupils' orientations towards parental involvement was related to the process of 'differentiation' and 'polarisation' between pupils in school. There were three issues of importance that his study highlighted. He discovered that in the fourth year band, pupils in the lower stream showed an association between their orientation to parental involvement and informal groups that they established. Secondly, he found that all pupils, no matter which band they were in, felt it was important that parents showed 'interest'. What was important to them was not the frequency with which their parents had contact with the school but the kinds of

events their parents attended. Finally, he discovered that Fourth Year pupils (this was not the case for those in the Second Year) whose parents attended the school showed a more favourable orientation to parental involvement. Sharpe was unable to reveal the causal nature of this relationship but was able to indicate that it was not only parental encouragement of children which was an important educational matter but also the pupils encouragement of their parents.

Sharpe's survey can be criticised for imposing the concept of parental 'interest' in the questions children were asked. However, the research does show that children's views change as they proceed through a school and that they are linked to the friendship groups which they establish in class.

Whilst some attention has been paid to the views of secondary school pupils, little research has been carried out on primary school pupils' experience of parental involvement. An exception is research carried out by Garvey (1977). He asked primary school pupils what it would be like if parents were to become involved in their school. The responses varied with the age of the children. At five years, parental involvement meant a chance for them to share their experiences with their parents. At seven years, parental involvement was seen as something strange and threatening. By the age of eleven, children were ambivalent, feeling that their parents were

unknowledgeable about modern methods and so were not likely to be of much help. Garvey argued that the findings indicated the gap between home and school. Parents were seen as outsiders and the children were concerned that their parents might not be 'acceptable'. Such research is rather limited. It would be useful to have research which looked at how children actually experience their parents' involvement. Are children's views changed when their parents become involved in their school or do they still see their parents as 'outsiders' and possibly 'unacceptable'? How do seven year olds adjust to their parent's involvement when it is seen as something which is strange and threatening?

Davies (1982), in her book Life in the Classroom and Playground. has shown how children construct their own reality and make sense of, and develop strategies to cope with, adults when they impinge on their world. Davies argues that the cultures of adults and children exist in parallel in the classroom - children have to attend to the demands of both teacher's and their own agendas. When parents participate in the classroom they have their agenda to attend to as well. Children's views of parental involvement need to be placed in the context of the culture which the children are developing within the classroom; their understanding of teacher's views of the presence of parents and other adults in their class.

The models of children's involvement, portrayed in the literature on parental involvement, present children as beneficiaries of, and messengers and mediators in, home-school relations. Children have also been seen as a resource to be used in communications between home and school. They have equally been presented as a source, often the only source, of parental knowledge about school and teachers' knowledge about the home. However, children's position of power in negotiating and manipulating relationships between home and school has been acknowledged.(Lindsey 1961; Sharp and Green 1975). Although children have been accorded an active role by some, information about their own views and experiences are seldom sought. Research must begin to look at children's experiences and locate them within their understanding of school, school life and the culture of their classroom, if we are to uncover what parental involvement means to them. This is one partner who has been ignored in all the rhetoric on partnership. Their experiences must be explored if the participatory notion of partnership is to provide an adequate framework for action.

In this chapter, I have outlined the perspectives on partnership which have been developed in the field of home-school relations. I have indicated that the focus of my research is the participatory model of partnership, an ideal which has been forwarded as a framework for action. I have used existing literature on parental involvement

to raise questions about the participatory perspective of partnership and particularly to focus on the assumptions which the principles of this perspective make about the experiences of the partners. The themes of the subsequent chapters will reflect the issues raised in this review of the literature on the rhetoric and reality of partnership between parents and teachers.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of parent use of the information passed on to them by teachers.

2. The starting point is how to create a criterion by which parents can choose their schools. This issue is taken up by Corrigan in his article in the Journal of Community Education. "A Hard Act to Follow", in which he talks of creating a 'new currency' by which parents choose schools. This is offered as a way to challenge the Governments attempt to encourage parents to choose schools on the basis of exam results. He argues:

> Running away from parental choice, running away from that market mechanism will achieve nothing. Creating a new currency that fits much more squarely within the hopes and aspirations of parents will confound the worst aspects of the market mechanism. (Corrigan:1989:p5)

3. See chapter 1 for a discussion of power relationships between parents and teachers.

4. For example, a study carried out by Mike Terry (1988) (during the period of my data collection) revealed that Primary Heads suffered the greatest level of stress in (and dissatisfaction with) their job when comparisons were made with staff in varying sectors of education (Primary, Secondary, Further Education). The survey revealed six major causes of stress: work overload; relationships with staff and other adults; resources and the market approach; the demands and constraint of local authorities; handling of inadequate staff; and feeling undervalued. Parents, I argue, could potentially be seen to increase the stress on all of these levels!

5. Indeed, this belief is confined by Bainbridge who comments, 'The professionalism of the teacher lies in the

decision-making role' (1988:p175). This notion of professionalism is threatened by definition of parent-teacher partnership which call for teachers to share their decision making with parents.

6.Indeed, the status of nursery teaching amongst the teaching profession is indicated in this comment by Cornor writing about the development of parent centres in primary schools in Liverpool, "We were intent on establishing the viability of nursery teacher's professional status upon our disbelieving colleagues, who were still labouring in the belief that the older the children you taught, the more skilled the teacher" (Cornor:1985:p5).

7.They have an opportunity to become familiar with the teachers and the routines and organisation of the school.

Part 2

Where rhetoric meets reality

In Part Two I will look at how the parents and teaching staff of Allestree and Baker schools experienced the reality of parental involvement. I contrast these experiences with existing accounts of the reality and rhetoric of parental involvement thus highlighting some of the assumptions which have been made.

In Chapter Three, I challenge the assumption that **teachers** view parental involvement predominantly in terms of their professional concerns and interests. I explore how parental involvement affects the existing concerns and interests of **teaching staff** and how this is managed. In Chapter Four I look at the assumptions made about parents' 'understandings' of their involvement in their children's school. Ideally, parents are supposed to gain an understanding of how their child, and why their child, is taught in a particular way. It is predominantly in terms of this ideal that others have researched parents' experience and understanding of school. In this chapter I look at the understandings parents reach about their involvement and their links to parent's concerns and interests.

CHAPTER THREE

PROFESSIONAL CONSTRAINTS?: HOW TEACHING STAFF ADAPT TO THE PRESENCE OF PARENTS

In the first part of this chapter I will look at how the social and cultural backgrounds of parents was viewed by the teaching staff of Allestree and Baker schools. How do the understandings and assumptions of staff fit into the development of school policy relating to parents? To examine this question I will look at the institutional bias of the schools. That is, the process by which staff develop their understandings of parental involvement. For Pollard (1985), the institutional bias is the product of the negotiations between participants within a particular organisation. I want to look at how such negotiations were achieved and managed by the staff of both schools.

Allestree School

Parental involvement was seen by Mrs. Black as a necessary response to deprivation within the school's community.[1]

> Mrs. Black: I've also got a very strong belief that if we're going to break the spiral of deprivation in this area then the only way we can do it is to educate two generations at the same time. Because we can't do it in isolation, in school, we have to do it with the parents as

> well. And the only way I think we'll alter things at all for the future is to actually educate the whole family at the same time. And that is really the basis of more or less everything we do at school.

Family education was an essential part of securing change within the community. It was a way in which future generations could be released from the grip of 'deprivation'. As the Deputy, Mr. Barns, also argued, "They're in a cyclical system [of deprivation] here and it's our duty to break the children out of it." For the rest of the staff, particularly in the nursery, school could at least compensate children and parents for the effects of deprivation within the community.

Allestree School, under Mrs. Black's headship, was about change and innovation: about bringing hope to the Allestree council estate. One aspect which she wanted to change was the image held of people in the area. As part of this process, Mrs. Black set out to prove that these people were interested in books and actually bought them. (She took photos, at the Book Week, to prove this!) It also involved a process of developing collective pride in the achievements of the children. Mrs. Black's attempt to foster this pride was particularly noticeable during assemblies. Parents were told how proud 'we' at school were of the children. Parents were encouraged to share in this pride. Phrases such as, "We think we have the best children in the world" were employed actively to encourage a positive image of the children amongst

parents, children and staff. Parents were an integral part of the changes that Mrs. Black had envisaged for the school. She had inherited a school where the previous Head and the staff were already attempting to involve parents, Mrs. Black had chosen to continue the development of this policy.

> Mrs. Black: Our policy, of the whole school and the staff as well, without exception, is that parents are a vital part of the educational process.

For Mrs. Black, parental involvement was seen as an integral part of the educational process in Allestree Infant School.[2] Some researchers have argued that the ethos of a school is a reflection of the head teacher's views (e.g. Sharp and Green 1975). However, Pollard (1985) feels it is vital to take into account the perspective, influence and strategies of other members of staff in a school. He adds:

> Of course, it remains likely that in most primary schools the person with the most influence will be the head teacher, and in such a case it leaves teachers, parents, ancillary staff and others negotiating only within the framework created by the head teacher's influence and power.
> (Pollard:1985:p123)

How did the rest of the teaching staff view parental involvement?

Parental involvement in Allestree School was built on the staff's recognition of the vital role parents played in education:

> Mrs. Keel: It's understood really, everyone feels the same, that parents are the most important part of what we do.
>
> Mrs. Vent: We're very keen on co-operation. As we come to discuss at staff meetings and things, whenever we're talking about curriculum or anything like that, of the many things, it is always parental involvement and how important we think that is in every sphere of our work.

Whilst staff felt parents had a vital roles to play, what this meant in practice varied from teacher to teacher, nursery nurse to nursery nurse.

For most staff, in principle, parental involvement involved an exchange of knowledge between parents and staff. In practice, however, this principle had some very different interpretations. For Mrs. Vent, an Infants' teacher, the exchange was problem orientated - parents and staff would work together in tackling a child's behavioural problem. For Mrs. Hash, in the Infants, the exchange between parents and staff was essential in breaking down the boundary which children may perceive between home and school. For Mrs. Beam, in the nursery, no exchange of knowledge was possible because of the type of parent in the school's community. Instead, Mrs. Beam adapted the idea of exchange to meet the perceived needs

of the parents. What were the needs of parents which staff at the school had identified?

The needs of parents: Parent education and support

The teaching staff at the school felt they were attempting to break the cycle of deprivation by both educating and supporting the parents.[3] Such interventionist strategies were in response to the perceived needs of the community. As we have already seen, the Head had identified a need for family education. A report produced and entered for a curriculum award emphasised this point:

> We are convinced that the only way to break the cycle of deprivation is by educating the parents with their children and by offering real alternatives of behaviour, handling and attitudes. (Allestree Report:p3:1986)

This view was echoed by other members of staff,

> Mrs. Judd: You're not just educating the Nursery child though, are you? In a lot of schools you are, but in our situation it's the whole family.

The central idea of the cycle of deprivation is that the problem of deprivation persists because it is transmitted from one generation to another. Family education becomes an appropriate solution. Robinson (1976) argues that this view confuses individual explanations with structural explanations. Staff recognise the deprivation

which the community suffer is a reflection of economic and social circumstances. At the same time, however, they adopt a 'social pathological' approach, which attributes the cause of the problem to the peculiarities of the individuals concerned. The solution then becomes one of changing the lifestyle of the parents.

Several staff thought some parents were unable to cope with their lives. Handling money, the pressures of unemployment, and children were another burden, another stress. Staff would offer them an alternative way to handle their child. However, Mrs. Black, in particular, saw no point in telling parents 'what they should be doing'. Instead, when parents came into the nursery to visit, or simply stay, the parents would learn by the example set by the staff.

> Mrs. Black: I think you can tell parents on and on and on what they should be doing but in fact by seeing a model day after day, if they come to the nursery, and by being able to see an alternative way of handling their children, then you extend the range of strategies they use themselves.

Teaching staff could educate the parents in ways of handling their children. This was seen to help the parents cope with one aspect of stress in their lives. Informal education and learning by experience was central to the way in which parents were involved in the school. Parents, however, were not simply identified as needing education, they were also seen to need support. The

interests of parents, themselves, were often seen to override interest in their children's education. This was because:

> Mrs. Beam: Parents have no interest in the children in the nursery. They just want to look after themselves. Look at Mrs. Melon, she stays but it's for herself. She just wants to chat. They've got nothing else to do. It's for themselves, rather than the child.

Mrs. Beam had a constant flow of 'parents' (women) in her nursery and a group of regular attenders had formed. She was convinced that the majority of parents came to the nursery for adult company and not because they were interested in their children's education. This view was shared by a nursery nurse who had just started at the school.

> Mrs. Johns: Well you see Danny [a pupil] is officially [started attending] in [the nursery] now but she [his mother] still stays all afternoon. Yes, Danny is going to be hard to settle in but I think it's more for her own sake that she [the mother] stays all afternoon.

Within the nursery there was a general understanding that parents (mainly women) who attended the nursery often did so for the adult company.

> Mrs. Johns: The one's who are perhaps single parents with kids, a baby at home, can't get out much, they just like to come and be amongst other adults and have a chat to an adult as opposed to always having the kids around them. I think some of them are just lonely.

'Parents' needed someone to talk to not simply because of their loneliness and isolation but also , the staff felt, because of concerns and worries they sought to share and solve. Mrs. Singleton, a nursery teacher, distinguishes the different motives behind parents attendance at the nursery.

> Mrs. Singleton: There are parents who come who want another adult to talk to, those who want to moan to someone and those that want advice.

Staff in both the nursery and infant school described how parents would come to them to talk over their problems. Staff felt that school was somewhere parents could come to and simply 'get things off their chests'. School had also become a place where parents could turn to if they needed 'support and counselling', where they could receive advice. The Deputy Head (Mr. Barns) argued, "They seem to need someone who's a bit more together to sort of push them in the right direction."

School was somewhere that parents could turn to when they needed help. Responding to this 'need' had become an integral part of the way in which the staff at Nursery Three saw themselves working. As a result, they spoke of providing a 'service' for the parents. School was somewhere parents could turn to talk and seek advice. In Nursery Four emphasis was placed on offering parents the security which was felt to be lacking in their lives.

In order to provide this service for parents, in order to establish relationships which were essential to the aims of involving parents, staff felt they needed to break down barriers that existed between parents and teachers, school and community. These barriers were seen to result from the parents' own educational experiences.

Some staff felt parents did not see teachers as human beings. For other staff, there was a need to show parents that staff were, "Not as awful as people make out". Staff in the nursery felt they were often fighting to dispel these kinds of myths. To this end, teachers in the nursery adopted various strategies talking about their personal lives, treating parents as friends, admitting failures.

Given the character of the school's community and the needs the teachers had identified, what were the initiatives developed in the school to involve parents?

"Parents are always welcome at Allestree"

A central strategy for involving parents in Allestree School was their 'open door' policy. An integral part of this was parental access to staff. The Head's door was always 'wedged open'. The Head saw this as a symbol of her own, and the staff's, availability. This philosophy was outlined in two booklets given to parents to inform them about their children's classroom. The booklets were

written as if a child were telling its parent what happened during the school day. The nursery booklets include a paragraph which stated, "My mum and dad can stay and play whenever they want to. They can talk to my teacher any time."

The infants' booklet had a similar statement but parents were reminded of the additional constraints of the Infants' teacher:

> My family can come and see my work, or my teacher or Mrs. Black [the Head] any time. My teacher may be busy with other children, but she will always be pleased to see you.

The message was clear, teachers were available and parents were welcome to participate and share in their children's education. However, this principle was not without its contradictions in practice. There were examples of the access to school being restricted. Notices on the doors of all the nursery and infant classrooms stated that parents should not enter the room during story time at the end of the day. Parents were reminded of this rule in a letter. In practice this rule was open to the interpretation of the staff.

For Mrs. Black openness was not simply about availability and accessibility but also acceptance.

> Mrs. Black: I think they [parents] feel we're open, not just that the doors are not locked, but that the attitudes are open as well. We also try very hard not to be judgemental about

> some of the families here who have got severe problems. The teachers try to be open and to not be making middle class judgements because most teachers are middle class people. Trying to understand what it must be like to be under the sort of pressure a lot of our families are under.

Showing 'understanding', empathy and being non-judgemental was part of the philosophy of openness for Mrs. Black.

For a number of the nursery staff openness referred to the atmosphere in the school. They tried to create an atmosphere which they felt would be conducive to attracting parents into the classroom. Here a new member of staff describes the atmosphere in Nurseries Three and Four:

> Mrs. Kopeck: It's the atmosphere, the happy go lucky atmosphere. Do as you want and when you want and sort of get on with it. I reckon mums fit better in Jack's [Nursery Three] and Liz's [Nursery Four].

There was much pride amongst the long serving members of staff in the nursery, some of whom had been at the school for ten years, that the atmosphere within school was 'family' like. It was described as a supportive atmosphere. Parents could moan, laugh and relax in the school. School was a place where parents and children could go to be happy:

> Mrs. Judd: Everyone asks you how you are, don't want you to feel you're not cared about. It's a caring atmosphere for everyone, children and parents.

The nursery nurses in Nurseries Three and Four aimed to make the parents feel 'at home'. This was an atmosphere of inclusion rather than exclusion, of support and a sense of belonging, which had become their interpretation of the 'open door' policy.

Overall, informality was a constant theme in strategies developed to involve parents in this school. It was informal in response to the need of the parents and also because the Head believed that structured involvement of parents was not possible in the classroom situation. Mrs. Black recognised that a situation where parents, teachers and children worked together could be a means of improving the language delays and lack of educational stimulation which many of the new entrants in the nursery were seen to have. Yet she felt, "..this is not possible, in a structured way, in a busy classroom".[4] Thus, when parents went on visit with their children (which all parents had to do before their child officially started school) or if parents simply popped into the nursery, their time in the classroom was not structured. Instead, an emphasis was placed on informality and accessibility:

> Mrs. Black: I think because we are accessible all the time then they [the parents] can come in a lot and talk about the curriculum. They actually know what their kids are doing.

Parents of children in the infant school were seen to learn about their child's education through informal

chats with teachers at the end of the day when some parents came in to look at the children's work. Formal parental involvement in the classrooms occurred when parents came at set times to help teachers with specific tasks. Conveying the curriculum and methods to the parents was done informally and individually.

In the nursery, parents came into the classroom on visits with their child or casually called in without any prearrangement with staff. Official accounts of visits (in the Governors' Report to parents) stated that parents came into the classrooms to share the experience with their children and this provided an opportunity for parent and child to learn together. Parents were only taught formally about the way pre-school children learn in 'Child's Play'. This was a course that provided parents with an opportunity to find out about early learning experiences whilst working with their child and his or her teacher. This was the only structured event which specifically aimed to teach parents how and what their children learned and, significantly, it took place outside of the classroom.

In general, parents learned of the methods employed in the school, and the part they could play in their children's education, in situations which were not created specifically or obviously for this purpose (for example, in assemblies and letter). As part of 'Book Week' at the school the infants performed in an assembly

for the parents. This assembly was used by the Head to talk about the story book approach to reading which the school had adopted:

> When the children had finished enacting the story from the book everyone began to clap. As the clapping subsided the Head invited us to give a special clap for the boy who had read out the story. Mrs. Black then explained about the story book approach. She hoped that they [the parents] had noticed the enthusiasm in the children for the stories and how well the children were reading. She said they [the staff] were proud of the children and she hoped the parents were too. She acclaimed the story book method because she believed it was responsible for these results. She noted the interest the children had in books which she felt would not have been found a year ago in the school. She then went on to say that she would like to take the opportunity to thank the parents for listening to the children when they brought books home. She said she hoped they enjoyed the books as much as they did at school.[5]

As Pollard has argued, heads may use assemblies as an opportunity to transmit and maintain their own values and perceptions (1985). In Burgess' study of a comprehensive school, the Head, Mr. Goddard, used such contact with parents as an opportunity to communicate his ideas about the image and organisation of the school (Burgess 1983). Similarly, Mrs. Black used the assembly, described above, to inform parents of the methods employed in the school. She pointed out to parents the criteria by which the success of the Story Book Method should be evaluated, this included the enthusiasm children developed for books and not just their ability to read. She concluded her

talk by referring to the role parents played in ensuring that this method succeeded.

The vital role of parents in teaching children how to read was also emphasised in a booklet which was produced to accompany a video explaining the story book approach. The booklet ended by stating, "Please help - the children are counting on you". The responsibility for educating children was clearly defined as a shared one between parents and teachers.

Parents were encouraged not only to accept their role in teaching children how to read but to accept and approve of the method by which they were taught. Letters sent home to parents were also used to convey the value of the story book approach, allay any fears about the success of the method, and emphasise the essential role parents were playing.

> Dear Parents,
>
> We are very pleased that children are learning to read so well and happily with the new story approach. Thank you for reading, listening to and sharing stories with your child.

Parental involvement was seen as essential in achieving the aims of the school and thus formed an integral part of teaching staff's work at the school. I now want to turn to Baker School and look at how the school's community was viewed by the staff and where parents were seen to fit into what the school was trying to achieve.

Baker School

Baker Junior and Infant School provided a contrast to Allestree School. The schools differed both in terms of the goals they pursued in relation to parental involvement and the needs of the school's community which they had identified.

In Allestree School, one was left with the distinct impression that involving parents in their children's education was unavoidable. This was perceived to be for the benefit of the children's education and also a response to: the type of parent; what parents were understood to need; and the type of curriculum the school was embarking upon. For Miss Frost, the Head of Baker School, however, parental involvement had to take its place in a hierarchy of concerns within the school. As Rice has suggested:

> For the head teacher of a school developing activities which have sought ways to involve parents, it became a question of priorities and role conflict. (Rice:1984:p19)

The Head stated in her first interview that she could only enforce policies which were, in her view, "vital to the children's education". Parental involvement was not one of these policies. Here, then, was the first and most fundamental contrast to Allestree School; parental involvement was not seen by the Head as a vital and

essential part of the children's education at Baker School.

There was a low level of participation in parental involvement initiatives by teachers in comparison to Allestree School. The teachers had been at the school from four to ten years and were not seen by the Head to be open to new ideas.

Indeed, she did appear to meet with resistance from teachers and this was often visible in the staffroom. Mrs. Small, a senior teacher, had become the catalyst for change within the school. Whilst identified as a leading figure in policy changes and innovations, other staff responded with overt challenges and hidden exasperation to Mrs. Small's ideas. In effect, Mrs. Small often appeared to be isolated as a result of her approach. It was in the context of this mutual apprehension between the staff and the Head that policies and initiatives were pursued. Firstly, the Head was aware of the resistance of her staff to changes. Secondly, the staff were aware that the Head tended to issue directives, instead of consulting and discussing with them:

> Miss Christian: It's good to have parents in and have parent workshops as well. It's a good idea. But I would be very upset if we were all told we had to, because you could easily imagine it. I think we've been told to do so many things.

The Head of Baker School could identify only three teachers whom she felt took part in initiatives to involve parents. Indeed, there were a number of teachers who did not associate themselves with these steps to involve parents. On reminding a Junior School teacher that the subject of my research was parental involvement in schools she commented, "I'm afraid you won't get a lot of that in my classroom". Similarly, when requesting an interview with a teacher on the subject, Mrs. Appleby (an Infants' teacher) replied, "I don't have anything to do with that." A number of staff disassociated themselves from initiatives to involve parents in school.

Whilst in Allestree School there was a sense that parental involvement was unavoidable, one was left with the distinct impression in Baker School that involving parents was avoidable. As this extract highlights, far from breaking down barriers between school and community some staff desired to maintain them. Here Mrs. Moon, a Junior School teacher, speaks of how shocked she was to have an ex-pupil call her by her first name:

> Miss Adam commented that in a way it's good [that an ex-pupil called Mrs. Moon by her first name], as it was breaking down the barriers. But Mrs. Moon replied, "Yes but you see I don't want to break them down".[6]

Mrs. Moon had also entered into a discussion with other members of staff regarding the use of teacher's first names in the Governors' Report for parents. She did not

agree with this practice, but her concern came to no effect since the document had already been sent to the printers. In this school, there appeared to be teachers who were not seeking to break down the barriers which may exist between parents and teachers, school and community but were actively trying to maintain them.[7] Parental involvement in Baker School was not an inevitable part of children's education and definitely something that could be avoided. However, as with Allestree School, those teachers who did attempt to involve parents in their children's education, did so in response to their view of the school's community and its needs.

Initiatives to involve parents in Baker School included a range of activities from drop-in groups and toy libraries to workshops and shared reading sessions. Despite the provisions made for parents to socialise within the school, the groups which met received ambiguous support. The emphasis was on responding to the educational needs of the children, and much less attention was given in Baker School to the parents' social needs. It was the more formal attempts to involve parents in the children's curriculum which appeared to receive the support and priority within the school.

Workshops for parents were held in two junior and two infant classes. They were designed to give parents an opportunity to work alongside their children in the classroom and see the methods by which their children

were taught. This was seen to be particularly significant for the Gujarati parents (who accounted for 30% of the parent population) who were believed to hold certain views on how their children should be educated. There was a shared understanding amongst the staff that Gujarati parents wanted their children to receive a 'formal' education, with emphasis on Mathematics and English and examinations.

Teachers continually expounded this understanding of the concerns and interests of Gujarati parents. The account Miss Christian, a Junior School teacher, received of the governors' meeting for parents included a reference to these concerns. "I mean at the parent-governors meeting they [Indian parents] wanted the three Rs and exams." By encouraging parents into the workshops teachers were able to define to parents, particularly Gujarati parents, what counted as education in the school.

In the infants' workshop Mrs. Small also addressed herself to what she felt to be the views held by the Gujarati parents:

> Mrs. Small commented to me that the purpose of curriculum workshops was to involve the parents in play activities, rather than the formal curriculum, and show the mothers the value of play. However, she felt that Gujarati parents preferred 'tangible' things rather than play.[8]

Mrs. Small felt that parents, especially the Gujarati parents, made a distinction between play and work. In one

of the earlier workshops she outlined her views on this distinction but began by referring to what she presumed to be parents' perceptions of art and work:

> She commented to the parents at the workshop, "Up until now you might think we haven't done any work, as you might define it." She said that she did not want to do only arts and crafts in the workshops but then added. "Not that arts and crafts aren't important." She justified her definition of arts and crafts as work by outlining their educational value.[9]

Mrs. Small was not the only teacher in the infants to feel that art work was not valued by the Gujarati parents. Mrs. Appleby felt it was important to show parents how work was integrated and how Mathematics and art work were part of a whole.

> Mrs. Appleby: To Asian parents art is not important. The education system they are used to you have to pass exams at the end of each year. What concerns the parents is that the children are achieving. They like to see a page full of written work with ticks on it.

Teachers felt pressured by the Gujarati parents to account for the type of education they were providing in the school. The workshops then were an attempt to redefine to the parents what counted as education. Mrs. Small argued that ideally, "I would like the content of the workshops to reflect the parents' interests and those areas of the school life they would like to experience". In practice, parents saw those areas of the curriculum which Mrs. Small felt parents did not value.

For Mrs. White, the Junior teacher, parents were felt to be interested in the three 'Rs'. The workshop centred on these subjects in order that parents learnt how their children were taught at Baker School. The workshops could be seen as a response to the pressures of having to account to the Gujarati parents, in particular, for the education teachers provided.

The social side of parental involvement at Baker School involved an emphasis upon trying to ensure that different ethnic groups in the parent community mixed. They had not had much success in this aim since the drop-in group was dominated by white mothers. The purpose of the drop-in and the support it received from the staff, particularly the Head, seemed ambiguous. There were various accounts given about the function of the group. In the Governors' Report to parents, it was explained that, "The school runs a twice weekly drop-in session for parents, including the viewing of films and discussion with outside speakers." Significantly, perhaps, this description came at the bottom of a list of activities headed, 'Activities involving parents and the community.' As an account of events at the drop-in, this description was unrecognisable to the participants. It certainly did not describe my experience of the group in the six months period I attended it. The drop-in usually consisted of a regular group of about six mums who were all white, with the exception of one Punjabi woman who would occasionally attend. When they met, the group of women would chat and

drink tea and were usually accompanied by their younger children. There was no evidence of any films or "discussions with outside speakers". A more accurate description of the drop-in group was provided in the newsletter produced in the school for parents. "All parents and their pre-school children are welcome to join an informal group of parents who meet regularly for a cup of tea and a chat."

The actual status and importance of the group within the school was often questioned by its members. When the group had originally formed the Head had encouraged parents along:

> Cath: She [the Head] said, "Come to the drop-in. If Sandra [her child] sees you she'll feel a lot better knowin' you're around school."

This was another account, by Miss Frost, of the group's function within the school. Yet, during my time there, Miss Frost did not appear to be keen on promoting the group. Parents whose children had just started to attend were rarely informed of the group's existence. Members of the group were annoyed at this because the Head did not seem to want to promote the group and attract members. Kate, a regular attender, described the level of support she felt the group received from Miss Frost:

> LM: Why don't many parents come to the drop-in then?
>
> Kate: It's not advertised enough, it's not explained enough. You've got parents comin' in

> every Tuesday afternoon, their children are startin', they should be told about it [the drop-in] now, explain exactly what it is. They encourage 'em to come to the workshops, which I think is great, so why can't they be encouraged to come to the drop-in or the mothers and toddlers [which was just starting] if they've got other kids? It's always left to the parents that's in the group to encourage 'em. If teachers encourage 'em it goes further. If I wanted something' she'd [the Head] say, "You write the letter and send it from you". Parents aren't going to take notice of a letter from me. Get a letter from the Head Mistress and they'll take note. It's got to come from the teachers.

The members of the group were unsure of the support they received from both the staff and the Head. This became an issue when the meeting place of the group was moved from a hall to a foyer. In the foyer, they were told that they would have to "ensure the children did not run around". Many of the mums felt this was a ridiculous place to situate a group of mums with toddlers. They were informed that, "the children [at school] come first". The hall was needed for dance classes for the children and so they would have to move elsewhere. Increasingly, the group began to feel marginalized and many stopped attending. The experience of the members of the drop-in group illustrates how, during the period of my study, Miss Frost identified and responded to the needs of parents predominantly in terms of their children's education.

Baker, like Allestree, had an open school policy. On my first visit to the school, Miss Frost informed me that there was supposed to be an open school policy but not to be surprised if someone asked me who I was when I walked

around the school! The Head herself was active in defining who were insiders and outsiders in the school. She often prioritized activities which left some people, including myself and members of the drop-in, with the distinct feeling of not being wanted. Miss Frost argued that the context in which parental involvement took place was vital, yet the availability and accessibility of staff was not actively promoted in Baker School. During my period at the school, parents began to comment on Miss Frost's availability. She appeared to become remote and less available to parents than she had previously.

In practice, the school's 'open' policy was incoherent. This enabled a diversity of values and perspectives regarding parental involvement to be sustained. The reaction of this teacher to the policy was typical:

> Mrs. Thompson: Parents should be encouraged to come into the school whenever they like because the school is open but not to do what they like.

The meaning of the 'open' school policy at Baker School was very different to Allestree School. The way in which the policy was spoken and written about indicated an underlying concern about maintaining control. Parents would not be able to come and go as they wanted, "We welcome you [the parents], at all reasonable times, to discuss you're child's progress, and any other matters relating to the School."[10] This last example, from the Governors' Report to parents at Baker School provides a

contrast with the policy of Allestree School outlined above.

There were also some distinctive contrasts in the practice of parental involvement between Baker and Allestree Schools. Allestree School's involvement of parents was characterised by its informality and predominantly social character. While Baker Schools' involvement of parents was formal and predominantly educational.

Having looked at how the schools' communities were viewed by the teaching staff and how these views linked to their aims of parental involvement, the rest of this chapter will focus on the daily experience of parental involvement. I will show the relationship between the classroom interests and concerns of teaching staff and their perceptions of parents. I also examine the issues raised by parental involvement in class and the strategies and the adaptations adopted by staff. Finally, I will explore how the staffs' experiences of parents relate to the occupational identities of teachers and nursery nurses. I will start by looking at the staff's 'knowledge' of parent types at Allestree School.

'She's a pain in the neck': Teachers' and nursery nurses' 'knowledge' of parents.

What knowledge did staff at Allestree School develop of different 'types' of parent? I was interested to note in my field work the similarities in the teaching staff's categorisation of parents. As Hargreaves et al have pointed:

> One of the most basic ideas within the symbolic interactionist perspective is that man [and woman] understands things (objects, persons, events) by naming them, [and that...] To type other people - to name them, categorize them, label them - is an inherent part of understanding them.(Hargreaves, Hestor and Mellor:1975:p143)

Teaching staff began to 'understand' parents when they started to categorize them. Bastiani (1988:1989) has noted that teacher lore and staffroom mythology contain certain deep-seated stereotypes about what parents are like. Researchers, such as Bastiani, have maintained a 'healthy scepticism' about such stereotypes as 'uninterested' parents or parents who want to 'take over'. Rather than dismiss or disprove these stereotypes, I have sought to understand what they reveal about teachers' and nursery nurses' perceptions of parents.

First, the types or names which staff develop to describe parents were evaluative, and they reveal characteristics which were felt to be desirable or undesirable in parents. Secondly, I will look at how these typings of

parents become a dynamic in parent-teacher interactions. A vital principle of partnership for Bastiani is that teachers 'listen to parents' (1988). It is important, then, to see how the staff's knowledge of parents affects what they hear! It became apparent that staff used their 'knowledge' of parents as a mechanism for coping with them. Such 'knowledge' allowed teachers and nursery nurses to both understand and predict parental behaviour and therefore adapt to their presence. Thirdly, I was interested to discover what this knowledge of parents revealed about the concerns and interests of the staff. As Pollard discovered in his study of three schools, teachers have a strong desire to control their work situation. Workload, enjoyment, self image, stress and autonomy were aspects of this concern and they were all revealed when staff discussed their knowledge of parents.[11]

There were five broad categories into which staff tended to place parents: attention seekers; the hovering parent; aggressive parents; friendly/competent parent and the parents who wished to 'get rid' of their children. I will begin by looking at the complexities of the attention seeking parent.

'She's seeking your attention a lot of the time'

Teaching staff typified one group of parents' behaviour as attention seeking. Most staff spoke of different kinds of attention seeking behaviour which they saw as being dependant on the motives behind parental behaviour. The attention seekers included: pains; worriers and child centred attention seekers. The demands of attention seeking parents conflicted with the teaching staff's interests, particularly with their desire to control their work situation and contain their work load.

The child based attention seeker

> Mr. Wit (nursery teacher): She used to stand and say really stupid things to him [her son]. We both [himself and the nursery nurse] said, "Look, don't say that to him, he won't be like that." We just used to say, "Oh, come on Johnny, come and play. You don't cry. Shove that handkerchief away." 'Cause his mother always carried this damn handkerchief with her. And he's been fine.

Such 'horror' stories would be shared regularly by staff about parents who seemed to want their child to react before they left the classroom. Parents were seen to be maintaining their control of their children in the classroom by making it harder for them to be parted from their parents. I recorded another such incident in my field notes:

> Mrs. Green [teacher] remarked to Mrs. Singleton [teacher] about the trouble she's had with Roy [pupil]. The boy had refused to go to the toilet and then refused to eat his dinner. Mrs. Green commented, "We eventually got some beans down him at lunch". Mrs. Singleton, "All the family have been the same." Mrs. Green, "They come out with all these negative things, 'he won't stay, he won't', in front of him. It's bound to affect him. Children will play up to it. And then just when he's settled his mum comes and unsettles him. I mean, I can understand that parents are concerned when they first come". Mrs. Singleton, "But this is not the first time".[12]

This illustrates that parents, perceived by staff to be seeking attention from their child in this way, challenged the staff's control of their work situation. They made the job of settling the child into school harder and so increased staff's workload. The range of classroom concerns, which for some teachers included the maintenance of their autonomy, were highlighted not only by the presence of 'attention seeking' parents but also parents who staff described as 'pains'.

Pains

'Pains' were a direct challenge to the control of teaching staff. In the staff's descriptions of this extreme type of parent behaviour we are able to see a basic dilemma which parental involvement in the classroom posed:

> Mrs. Beam: She rabbits on non-stop and it drives me round the bend. She never stops talkin', but she means well. But as a person she drives me crackers. 'Cause she never stops, does she? But if I can get her off somewhere,

> and give her something to do, and try and stay the other side of the room or go and read a story, that way I can cope with her. But I couldn't cope with her for long in the classroom. You see I can't cope in a classroom situation with some parents behaving like that, because you can't get on with the job your supposed to do.

In practice, staff often felt a fundamental contradiction between their involvement with parents and the 'job that they are supposed to do'- educating children. The dilemma they faced was how to give attention to the child and the parent at the same time. For nursery nurses, the greater concern was the increase in workload that the presence of parents engendered. Whilst this was also an issue for teachers, the dilemma manifested itself as a threat to their autonomy. I will look at this contradiction in more detail later. It is important to emphasize here how limited resources, such as time, constrain the behaviour of staff and may affect how they actually typify parents in situations.

The behaviour of parents who were labelled 'pains' represents a fundamental loss of control to teachers. 'Pains' overstep the conventions of acceptable parent behaviour, as this contrast with 'good' parent behaviour illustrates.

> Mrs. Bean: (Sue) comes in and puts the kettle on. She's not pushy. If you said, "Do you want a cup of coffee?" She'd say, "Yes, please." Whereas Bev would come in and, no matter what you are doing, Bev would be at your ear, interruptin' over conversations. Bev doesn't

> come in to help, she comes in to have a gab (talk) and then goes. Sue comes in and takes the staples out, and she'll give her time to help you.

Pains disturb the routines of the staff and also take up a disproportionate amount of the staff's time. A contrast was also made in the parent's willingness to help. Yet, it was not simply a matter of whether parents are willing to help which leads to them being categorised as 'good' parents. No doubt, the parent Mrs. Beam describes here felt she was 'helping':

> Mrs. Beam: She's a pain in the neck too.
>
> LW: Why's she a pain?
>
> Mrs. Beam: Because she keeps drawing pictures for the child, and making models for him, and won't let him do anything for himself. She's the kind of person you couldn't cope with having in your nursery because she won't let the child develop at all.

The behaviour of parents who were described as 'pains' was seen to disrupt the teacher's job. Yet, as the extract above highlights, teaching staff hold certain definitions of what counts as help in the classroom which link to their models of education and child development. As I will show later, teachers and nursery nurses seek to establish routines in parental behaviour. It is in their interest to establish routines which will produce shared definitions of what parents should and should not do in the classroom. Pains contravene all such routines.

The worrier

Teaching staff felt the behaviour of 'worrying' parents to be understandable, yet potentially unfounded. Horror stories about worriers had a consistent theme, parents' concerns about their children were seen to be greatly out of proportion or misconstrued.

> Mr. Wit: Like John had a cough, and it was all because I'd let him play in the water without an apron, and she told me he mustn't play in the water.

Some parents were perceived as being too concerned about their children. Mr. Wit's comment indicates that he found it hard to cope with parents that he perceived to be over protecting their children. Teaching staff and parents who worry did not share a common understanding of a child's behaviour.

> Mrs. Green: When she first came she said Jenny was not toilet trained and made quite a big thing of it. Obviously, before I knew her [the parent], I said we couldn't have a child in the school who wasn't toilet trained. She [the parent] got very worried about that because her idea of toilet trained wasn't really our idea, she was more controlled than we thought.

What is interesting about this is the statement, "before I knew her". Knowledge of parents led to a level of prediction which helped teachers and nursery nurses to cope with parental involvement in the classroom. Thus situations of potential conflict over a child's needs and behaviour were neutralized by staff's knowledge of the parent. Parents were perceived to be concerned rather

than critical, such concern was seen to reflect some psychological defect in the parent which meant teaching staff were better able to cope with the parent's behaviour. To cope, teachers developed strategies such as 'letting things ride' - "I tell her not to worry and nod in the right places"; avoidance - "I try to get out of her way" or the establishment of little ritualistic routines to suffice parents' concerns and maintain teachers sanity:

> Mrs. Green: Now we've got little routines - like saying, "She's here now", "Can I just have a word with you I'm very worried about so and so?" She worries about little things so you have to be very careful what you tell her otherwise she would be so incredibly worried.

Again, an essential element of teaching staffs' work with parents was the establishment of routines. Even though such routines may have developed different meanings for staff and parents, they were crucial for staff in ensuring that they maintain control over their work situation.

The 'hovering' parent

The opposite to the attention seeking parent was the hovering parent. They did not directly demand attention from the teaching staff but waited for direction. In the classroom 'hovering' parents' behaviour was directed and initiated by the staff:

Mrs. Bloor: I think she wants to talk, she's hanging around isn't she? Did you see her hovering this morning?

Mr. Barns: Occasionally Christopher's mum hangs around. She comes in very early, say two.

Mrs. Terry: She pleads with you with her eyes.

Mr. Barns: She hangs around the door. I say come in and help with the writing, that's fine, she's happy to do that.

'Hovering' parents waited for the staff's directions before they acted. It is the staff who initiated any contact with these parents. Thus 'hovering' parents behaviour was quite firmly within their control.

Mrs. Nash: Some of them- like if David's dad hangs about I know he's being terribly polite and waiting 'til some of the other mums have had their turn.

Interestingly, the behaviour of women who 'hover' was explained in terms of lack of confidence whilst men's 'hovering' was interpreted in terms of politeness - male chivalry! Whether the cause of parental behaviour was lack of confidence or 'politeness', these parents posed no threat to teaching staff's control of the classroom - because the parents had developed a routine behaviour pattern of standing and waiting for the staff. The same could not be said of aggressive parents.

Aggressive parents

Aggressive parent behaviour was the ultimate threat to control. Parents' potential for aggressive behaviour was part of the cultural knowledge the staff held about the school population. As I recorded in my field notes:

> Mr. Barns (deputy) commented, as he was about to leave the staffroom, that they were lucky because the parents here didn't put 'pressure on'. "We have loonies", he added and explained how he'd had to pull a few parents off Sue [the Head teacher] in the past. But he felt the staff were not pressurised to ensure children achieved. 'To make sure they passed the entrance exam for Westminster' he joked.[13]

Aggression in parents was part of what 'parents are like' on the Allestree estate. This was one of the most stereotyped views of parent types. Yet aggression from parents was seen to be a rare event:

> Mrs. Green:she's the one that..Once Jo had a bite mark on her arm, I don't know where she got it from, but she seemed alright, she wasn't upset about it. The next day I said to Jo, "How did you hurt your arm?" She said, "Like this!" [the teacher sucks on her arm]. Did it herself you see. So I said to her, "Show your mum what you did to your arm yesterday", and her mum turned around to me and said, "You told her to say that, you made her say that." And she was really quite aggressive as if I was letting some other child get away with hurting her child.... I said, "What you said is not quite true". And she got more and more annoyed. I said, "If you feel that strongly you should go and see the Head". She was getting very angry over something that was really nothing. It was quite hard to deal with.

Aggression was hard to deal with. It was a behaviour pattern which was both unpredictable and potentially

uncontrollable. Aggressive parents challenged the teaching staff's definition of the situation, characteristically they 'would not be told'. Parents who were perceived as wanting to 'get rid' of their children threaten the staff's definition of the situation also.

Parents who want to 'get rid' of their children.

The worrying parent was an extreme type who was perceived to be too concerned with their child. At the other extreme was the parent who was seen as wanting to 'get rid' of their children. This typification of parents was prevalent amongst the staff in the nursery. Nursery children had not reached an age where schooling was compulsory as it was still optional for parents. Staff felt that for some parents the nursery provided an opportunity for them to 'get rid' of their children:

> Mrs. Bean: Karl's mum just wanted him in, no way could she involve herself. Don't know what she does with her time but she doesn't want to be involved.
>
> LW: How do you know that?
>
> Mrs. Bean: She actually came in before he started. Now he's started she can't wait to get rid of him and collect him later. And all she wants to know is when can he have a full-time place with a dinner. It'll be easier for her. You get parents like that, who really don't want to be involved at all.

This extract shows the type of parent behaviour which the teaching staff took as indicative of parents who wanted to 'get rid' of their children. Parents' views on full-

time places were seen to demonstrate their attitudes towards their child's education as this extract from my field notes also illustrates:

> When the mother had gone, the nursery nurse came over to me and explained what she had just been discussing with a mother. She told me how she had just offered a mum a full-time nursery place for her son. The mother had refused the place explaining that she worked nights and if her child was to come to the nursery in the afternoons, she would not see anything of him. The mother had then gone on to point out that the child was only three. The nursery nurse said that she felt 'bad' about asking the mother. "I felt I was pushing for the mother to leave the child". The nursery nurse then argued that it was good that the mother wanted her child to attend part time. "Too many of them can't wait to get rid of them".[14]

A number of the staff in the nursery believed parents should not want to place their three year old child in nursery full-time. This view was linked to the idea that early childhood was a precious time which should not be missed. Other staff in the nursery felt parents who got rid of their children failed to appreciate and utilise the benefits which nursery education could offer their child.

> Mrs. Beam [a nursery teacher] tells Mr. Wit and Mrs. Whitehouse [a nursery and an Infants' teacher] that she attended a meeting the previous night about under fives, given by Mr. Forest, a Director of Education in Midshire. She recounted how he stated that he did not believe in nursery provision for every child, and that no new nurseries would be opened. Mrs. Beam added that she felt parents just used nurseries to, "get rid of their children". "They don't understand what it's all about", she added. "And it's the teachers job to show them".[15]

Staff felt that parents who used the nurseries to 'get rid' of their children did not understand the value of nursery education and did not recognise how precious the early years of childhood were.

These were not the only assumptions which were implicit in the notion of parents wanting to 'get rid' of their children. This typing of parents has special significance when we focus on women. Mothers who appeared to want to 'get rid' of their children were seen by staff as acting selfishly by putting their own needs before those of their children's.

> Mrs. Judd: Mavis Shaw, when Andrew first came to school she would not leave that child alone. She would have spent all day at school, well she did, she was always there. Then as soon as she got into this Moving On thing, when she was going to school herself and doing things, it was, "Well I can't stop now 'cause I'll be late for school". So in a way they're very selfish. I think she was using him as a sort of crutch to begin with. She didn't want to let him go. She needed to be needed, but once she'd got something else to do she doesn't see his needs in the same way. Her needs are coming first.

Mavis was seen by the nursery nurse to either over-mother her child or, at the other extreme, put her own needs before those of her child. Women tread a thin line between not caring enough for their children and caring too much. Halterline noted that along with the expansion of the mothers' role, in the first half of this century, went a contrasting psychological theory of over-mothering.By the Fifties this concern related to the fear

that, "the mother would, because of her fear of the 'empty-nest' stage, prolong this period of dependency and prevent the child from becoming self reliant" (Halterline:1980:p612). This 'fear' was shared by a number of staff in the infants sections. Mr. Barns, the Deputy Head, described mothers who wanted to 'do everything' for the children when they helped out in the classroom. He argued that this reflected the mother's need to be needed.

> Mr. Barns: One of the functions of women on this estate...See, what they can do successfully is have children. Also there's this dependent side to it. They like someone [to depend on them] or otherwise they're bottom of the stack. It is the women who do all the meals, do all the housework, the bloke goes off and has his fun in the pub. They're left at home. What do you do? You do two things, you have children and you smoke. And I think they are two very useful functions or otherwise these women might start to become to feel defunked and of no use to anybody. I think this is the kind of dependence I'm talking about. They need somebody to need them.

But this type of mother is not always useful to the teacher.

> Mr. Barns: Jo's mum, she'll do everything - getting them dressed. That's not the idea, that's not what it's all about. And she'll walk straight in and she'll look for someone who's dependent basically.

At the other extreme from the dependent mother is the mother who appears to want to get rid of her child. This behaviour also meets with disapproval and is a reflection of the traditional concept of a mother being the

constant, exclusive, caretaker of a child. This idealized image of mothers and children is referred to in Oakley's study of housework:

> Where the social image of motherhood vests the mother-child relationship with an aura of mutual contentment, women grow up to expect that they will enjoy their child-care activities. (Oakley:1974a:p176)

The question Ann Oakley was keen to address was whether women did enjoy being mothers. Her research revealed that although the forty women in her study did not declare a dislike of child-care, a considerable number did go on to express an ambivalent feeling towards it. Whether women derive 'satisfaction' from their child-care role or, indeed, feel ambivalent towards the demands of their maternal role will have implications for their experience of being involved in their child's school as we shall see in Chapter Five.

Women who teachers felt wanted to 'get rid' of their children were not simply disapproved of because their actions ran contrary to the staff's views of motherhood. These mothers were also seen to create problems for the teachers in their work. Jack Wit (a nursery teacher) describes the 'get rid' parents behaviour when they visited.

> Mr. Wit remarks that some parents just want to 'get rid of their children' and when they found out that they would have to visit they would just sit in the classroom and 'put up a

> barrier'. He mimicked the parents faces - open mouthed and expressionless. "This", he argues, "was really hard to work with".[16]

The conflicting understandings of 'get rid' parent and teaching staff over the purpose of nursery education was felt by some staff to threaten teachers' and nursery nurses' self-image. Staff believed that parents who wanted to 'get rid' of their children saw the nursery simply as somewhere their children could be left. This definition of the classroom was perceived to be a challenge the educational roles of teachers and nursery nurses.[17] The 'get rid' parent threatened to impose a new pragmatic self image upon the teaching staff.

> Mrs. Johns: When they come in and say, 'She's really poorly but she wanted to come to school', to me I just think, 'And you wanted to go to town and do your shopping, so you want somewhere to dump your child'. It really rilas me because than I think, why am I here? I am just... they look at me as somewhere the child goes so they can do what they want in the day.

The nursery nurse felt that parents saw her more as a child minder than an educationalist. The nursery nurse experienced a dilemma between maintaining an ideal self-image of her job or adjusting it in line with the pragmatic view some parents seemed to take of her role.

Friendly and Competent parent

A common theme in teachers' and nursery nurses' 'knowledge' of parents are the staff's interests and concerns in the classroom, particularly those of autonomy, work load and self image. Parents were categorised in terms of the degree to which they supported teachers' definition of the classroom situation. It is important to note the distinctive pattern which emerged in the categorisation of parents made by the staff at Allestree School. These categories indicated extreme kinds of inappropriate and inadequate parent behaviour. Parents were categorized as 'over concerned' or 'not concerned enough', parents were 'too shy' or 'too aggressive'. This indicates the characteristics of the 'ideal' parent. Indeed, extremes of inappropriate behaviour continue to be used in staff's descriptions of the 'good' parent.

> Mr. Wit: A friendly mum is someone who will come in and be friendly from the start, will talk to you straight away and settle into the nursery routine and life quite easily. Not be too shy or too aggressive. Some mums want this, that, and the other doing and we're not quite prepared to do it.

A 'good' parent was neither shy nor aggressive. They adapt to the routines the teachers established in the nurseries. They were willing to negotiate with the staff the meaning of the situation. They did not try to impose their definition of the situation as teachers perceive 'pains' and parents who want to 'get rid' of their

children were thought to do. A 'good' parent had 'appropriate' knowledge, for example, of their role in their child's education. They also had appropriate knowledge about the school routine,

> Mr. Barns: They [a 'core' group of parents] knew the set up, they knew where everything was - ideal.

> Mrs. Green: She was quite confident. She knew what the routine was in school so she could be more positive with it like, "You do this or you don't do that on school".

These parents are seen to act in the interests of the teaching staff. Teachers, in particular, were concerned that parents did not increase their work load, as this interview material illustrates:

> Mr. Barns: Some times I find having parents in the class, it's like having six kids, like having a students sometimes. They [parents] don't seem to use their initiative and so your directing them with a group of children because they don't have control. So it becomes more difficult, you've got an extra person in the classroom who's not being that much use.

> Mrs. Nash: She does what ever I ask her to do really. She does cooking or she does art work. She likes doing something with her hands with about four children and she comes on a regular basis, Tuesday afternoons and Thursday afternoons. She's very, very good because I'm not in the room, I have to go off for a P.E. lesson in the middle of the time she's here, but she carries on. And when one child finishes she sends one in and I send one out. Really good.

Teaching staff appear to want parents who show some degree of autonomy and initiative. Familiarity, regularity and competence combined to lead some parents in the nursery section to be given quasi-staff status:

> Mrs. Judd: Dorothy's another member of staff. She feels useful now, 'cause she feels such a part of the family that she's got her own tasks to do. She gets the milk ready.

> Mr. Wit: She [Ellen a parent] gives up her spare time, she helps with the sewing and she helps, well, she helps generally. She's just like one of the staff in a way. She'll just come in and she'll do things without being prompted.

Staffs' 'knowledge' of parents was a vital mechanism for enabling them to cope in their work with parents. They sought parent behaviour which was predictable and routine, that maintained their own self-image and contain their work load. Some teachers also sought parent behaviour which preserved their autonomy.

I will now turn to look more closely at the conflicts and contradictions which presence of parents in the classroom raised.

'Our job is really with the children': adaptation-the contradictions and dilemmas of where to place parents in the teaching role.

In the above descriptions of parents, the issue of sharing time between parents and children was touched upon. At times, the aim of involving parents in the classroom may be seen to conflict with trying to educate the children. This was an issue which was highlighted in the studies by Cyster et al (1979) and Tizard et al (1981). They have pointed out that teachers often feel they are faced with managing the demands which parents and children make on their time. They argue:

> Many teachers still find it difficult to judge how much time should be spent in advising parents, time which might be put to better use in educating the children. The resolution of these parental conflicts must surely be a matter of concern for educational decision-making at all levels. (Cyster et al:1979:p109)

Research has neglected to focus on how staff perceive and manage these conflicts. What are the factors involved in decisions on sharing time? What strategies do staff eventually adopt to resolve the conflict? Here I will focus on the issue of parents wanting to talk in the classroom to illustrate how such conflicts evolve, are perceived and are resolved.

A recurring theme with the majority of staff at Allestree Infant School was the disruption caused by parents

talking. Staff frequently spoke of the contradictions and dilemmas which arose when parents came into the classroom to talk to them. Talking with parents was seen to be acting in accordance with the school's open school policy. Such conversations made them feel welcome and it was believed that parents would begin to feel at ease in the classroom situation. Yet conflict arose in two interrelated ways. First, welcoming parents meant teaching staff were not giving their full attention to pupils. Secondly, conversations with parents were perceived to clash with organizational goals of the classroom. This produced a dilemma:

> Mrs. Johnson: Well if I'm talking to them [parents], I feel I should be with the children. But I hate to see visiting mothers and you haven't got the time to talk to them and I end up apologizing to them for not having time with them. Some will say, "Oh, it's alright, I can see how busy you are". But I wonder if they think we're not friendly enough.

As more and more demands are made of the teaching staff: new teaching methods; less resources; bigger classes; national curriculum; parents represent another demand on their time.[18] Interestingly, the dilemma poses itself as a direct choice between spending more time educating the pupils or giving time to 'welcoming' the parents. A nursery nurse commented:

> Mrs. Kopeck: I do like talking to 'em (the parents). But I do feel I talk to the mums too much, when I should be looking after the children, sorting the children out.

The dilemma between conversing with parents and the education of the child was exacerbated when conversations came at 'inconvenient' times.

> Mr. Wit: It can be really irritating when you're doing something, like those clay models we were doing. I mean, I was really engrossed doing those with the children and we did a lot of language work. It didn't happen, but it could have happened that Julie would have come over and started talking to me and that would have ruined the whole thing. So really, it's ever so difficult, because you're trying to encourage the parents to be interested and to talk to you [at the same time].

This indicates something of the conflict in goals which conversations with parents may pose for staff. Here the aim of educating the child is seen to conflict with gaining parental interest. In another interview, a teacher spoke of the conflicting aims of getting parents to 'join in' and settling the child into the nursery.

> Mrs. Beam: Most parents sit with the child to begin with anyway and tend to steer away. And it's not unless you start talking to them, and ask them for a coffee, that they do...Like John's mum, in the end, was giving us a life history, only because we started talking a lot: how they're getting on and what they're doing? It might be just as important but, because then you're talking to them all the time, you're not having anything to do with the child. And it's the child you're trying to get into the environment not them.

'Getting to know' the parents can conflict with trying to instil in the children an organised routine. This is illustrated in this teacher's description of the ideal organization of her class on a Monday morning:

> Mrs. Nash: I think that the children I've got, the particular band of children, they're a riotous bunch. It's been solved on a Monday because Sue (the Head) has them all in the hall. That's smashing. Not only are you taking the money, your talking to the parents. It's a good organized start to the week. Because then, the children come down after ten minutes, and of course you've got to get rid of the parents, and you can receive the children. The ideal situation.

But the ideal situation for the children is not always reaching the ideal aims with the parents. As Mrs. Nash goes on to point out:

> Mrs. Nash: I have thought about this. The balance has to come up, that I can't push the mums out because I want them all sitting on the carpet five minutes earlier than I would otherwise have done ...I wouldn't sacrifice parents coming in for that. It's just got to take longer, we've just got to acknowledge that we're not going to be having the registration until quarter past nine - whereas in a lot of other schools I know of, the mums just leave them [the children] at the door.

Talking with parents, even to gain what one teacher referred to as the "little things it's important to know about their [children's] lives", is seen as being at the sacrifice of ideal organization. Working with parents involves compromises. Why do goals related to parents and children appear to conflict?

To begin with, parents are a potential threat to staffs' control of their work situation. At Allestree School, the second major reason for this perceived conflict arose out of a particular view of the community and aims of

parental involvement. This has led to some ambiguity about where parents fit into the teachers' work. As we have already seen, nursery nurses seemed particularly unclear where parental involvement in the classroom fitted into their job:

> Mrs. Kopeck: If you stand talking to a mother, I feel I'm not doing my job, when you really might be doing as good a job as if you were with the children. But then I'm employed here to be with the nursery children. I do find it difficult here, with the parents being in, because I'm never sure if I'm doing the right thing.

> Mrs. Johnson: I did find that hard when I worked in there [Nursery Four]. Because the parents were sort of interrupting you, when you were trying to concentrate on the children. Because, I mean, you are there for the children as well. Well, you're supposed to be there for the children full stop. But parents need... I don't know.

For some nursery nurses the conflict arose because they felt their job was to work with the children. As a result the nursery nurses seem unclear about where parents fit into their job. For teachers, questions produced by parental presence were more likely to be related to specific clashes of parent related and child related goals. How do staff cope with these dilemmas? What strategies do they employ?

Talking with Parents: A Working consensus in Nurseries Three and Four

As we have already seen, teaching staff at Allestree School held distinct views on the social and cultural background of the parents:

> Mrs. Beam: They're not really interested in their children's education. They don't involve themselves because their not interested in their children's education. They involve themselves in school because they don't really have anything else to do really. A lot of them that come up here want to be involved to give themselves a purpose in life. If their husbands are at home, or not working, you can't be on top of each other all the time. You're better off in a warm environment where you can have a coffee and feel secure really, because they've never had it, and their children haven't got it. It's a matter of educating the parents first, but I don't think you'll ever do that. I mean, the parents never will change. They'll always have the same attitude and I don't think they'll ever have any more interest in their children's work, a lot of them. They just like to have something to come to that's for them. It's like Mavis and Dorothy. I mean Mavis wouldn't go out of the door on her own, now she's started coming here... and now she's gone to the Moving On course. She doesn't need us any more. It's all this social thing, that some people are into, that you get them through one thing, give them the confidence in themselves to go on to something else. It's better for the parents really, it gives them something to do with their lives.

Ideally, Mrs. Beam wanted to change the attitudes of the parents towards their children's education. However, this was constrained by what she believed to be pragmatically possible, in the light of her 'knowledge' of the parents and their needs. Staff in Nurseries Three and Four felt themselves to be providing an environment in their classrooms to meet the perceived needs of the parents.

Here Mr. Wit identifies the needs of one of the parents in his nursery:

> Mr. Wit: I think Sue needs other adults and she needs to be in a stimulating environment, she needs to be out in a different environment to that of the home.

Like Mrs. Beam in Nursery Three, Mr. Wit and Mrs. Bloor also saw themselves as providing what Mrs. Bloor referred to as 'a service' for their parents. As Mr. Wit observed:

> Mr. Wit: I like to think we are here so that if they've got a problem at home, and they needed someone to talk to, I like to feel we're here to be able to talk to them.

It is indeed true that many women did go to the school to socialize with other mothers.[19] What may have appeared as a socializing arena for parents in the classroom was perceived to be an accommodation of parents' and staff's interests and goals. The classroom provided an opportunity for parents to socialize and share their 'problems'. At the same time, teachers and nursery nurses felt they gained the confidence of the parent, which was seen to be of long term benefit to their child's education. The struggle between the immediate needs and interests of the parent and the child continued within the bounds of this working consensus. The extent to which there existed a working consensus within this classroom - and a shared meaning over what was 'going on' in the room - can be illustrated by the confused interpretation of the situation made by a newly arrived member of staff.

Mrs. Kopack: I thought that when they told me there was a lot of parent involvement in the school it was to encourage parents to learn about educating the child, rather than just sitting around and just watching them basically. But they're not there because.. they don't seem to want to do that. They just seem to want to socialize amongst themselves. They do want to get rid of their children and socialize with their own age. I don't know how it works in any of the other schools. I've never been to a school that involves parents like that. It amazed me when I walked in there the first day there were loads of parents standing there but they only seemed to stand there and talk to themselves - they don't seem to be involved with the children. There only seems to be Ellen that does anything.

The working consensus which had evolved over parental behaviour in the classroom helped staff to cope with an otherwise conflicting situation. By defining the classroom as a place in which to socialize, both parents' and teaching staff's interests were maximized. The parents had somewhere to come and chat and relax. The staff had an opportunity to 'get to know' the parents and break down some of the barriers they felt existed between parents and the school. Of course, the staff also had a chance to chat themselves, their own enjoyment being of interest to them.

Avoidance: "Oh, excuse me, I'm busy."

One strategy staff employed to ensure that talk with parents did not conflict with their own work with children was through avoidance of contact:

> Mrs. Singleton: Some of them will start talking to you while whole hell's let loose and then you have to excuse yourself.

Avoidance was not a strategy simply used by individual teachers. Staff develop collaborative techniques to avoid parents:

> Mrs. Johnson: She doesn't stop talking, you have to look for help sometimes to be saved. Again, because you look at your watch and it's quarter past ten and you've done nothin' but talk to Mary.
>
> LW: How does someone save you then?
>
> Mrs. Johnson: Well, we've got now that somebody says, "Could you just do this?" or, "I've got to go to so and so". It would be nice to stand and talk to her but you can see everything going awry, and you know you've got to go and get crackin' with what you want to get done. Nursery sessions are very short anyway.

Again a crucial factor was the sharing of time between conversations with parents and ensuring things 'got done'. To this end teachers and nursery nurses had to assess how important talking with parents was in order to decide whether or not to give them time. As the above extract indicates, a crucial element in the staff's decisions over whether to give time was their knowledge of the parent. Where teachers and nursery nurses speak of using avoidance strategies, it was generally with parents they had labelled as 'pains'. There was also evidence that staff redefine situations where parental desire to hold conversations could have been interpreted as irrelevant or inconvenient. Crucial in such redefinitions was staffs' knowledge of the individual parent.

Redefining the situation: Coping when parents talk

Teaching staffs' knowledge of parent types was a critical factor in the process of redefining situations of potential conflict when parents wanted to talk:

> Mrs. Green: I was worried that she felt awkward. Then she began to settle, encouraging Jenny and things, and once I realized she was such a 'worrier' I understood it all.
>
> LW: You said she began to settle in?
>
> Mrs. Green: Talk more, sit with Jennifer more, talk generally about things that had happened, like my marriage. She became more relaxed in herself in the classroom. Although sometimes what she said seemed to be a bit stilted, she was joining in. It was a big break-through. Sometimes she came in, in the middle of a story, and said something to you. But the fact that she was trying to join in and everything, you valued that rather than the interruption.

Knowledge that the parent was a worrier, and would take longer to settle into the classroom, led the teacher to redefine a situation of potential confrontation - a parent interrupting story time. Here, the goal of trying to settle the parent into the classroom is given precedence to that of reading the children a story. Yet still there is a perceived conflict between the needs of parents and children.

These processes of judging the value of parents' conversation with parents, and negotiating between parent and child related goals, find their dynamic in the member of staff's knowledge of the parents concerned.

In Allestree School, the aims for involving parents reflected the teaching staff's view of the school's community and the social needs of the parents. In trying to achieve these aims the staff had been faced with a conflicting choice between parent related and child related goals which was exacerbated by limited resources. Staff coped in a number of ways with the day-to-day dilemma of juggling between these conflicting concerns. They employed immediate strategies of avoidance and used their knowledge of parent types, and parents in particular, to redefine situations of potential conflict.

In Baker School, teachers did not perceive a conflict in demands between time spent with parents and children. This, I would argue, was a reflection of the emphasis placed on the educational nature of parental involvement in the school and the focus on the need to ensure that parents were knowledgeable about the current educational system. This was seen to be a greater issue for the predominantly Asian community than for the indigenous community. Indian parents had experienced a system where emphasis was placed upon examinations and the Bengali parents had "no idea at all how education works". Although the staff were aware of social needs of the community, (issues of parental confidence, barriers between school and home, and the need for the different ethnic groups to mix) emphasis was placed on the educational nature of parental involvement. Thus, the issue of parents wanting to talk was not treated in the

same way as this example of the parent workshop illustrates.

Parents' talk: an imposed definition of the situation

Mrs. White, who taught juniors at Baker School, organized hour long workshops for parents to attend, and carry out Mathematics and English work with their own child. The teacher resolved the potential conflict which a parent's desire to talk may produce, by imposing her definition of the situation. As I recorded in my field notes:

> She [the teacher] wanted it to be clear that they [the parents] were there to work and not to chat amongst themselves. [The teacher] commented that there was one thing she didn't want the workshops to become, and that was a meeting place to chat. She makes a conscious effort to separate the mums she knows are friends. She did this she said, in a 'discrete' manner.[20]

The discrete manner was to rearrange desks so that parents could not sit close to each other, and to direct parents to desks so as to separate those she knew to be friends. She sought to avoid the potential conflict between a parent's desire to talk and the education of both the children and parents by imposing her definition of the situation as a place of work for both parents and children. This she did by establishing a routine in the workshop which consisted of half an hour of Mathematics and half an hour of English. The close watch the teacher maintained on the workshop ensured that the routine was

kept to. The teacher appeared to exhibit a far greater degree of formal control on parental presence than could be seen in the nursery. However, developing such routines was vital to all the classrooms, as a means of establishing staffs' definition of the situation.

Routines and Regaining Control

When parents visited the nursery classrooms at Allestree School before their child officially began school, there was a period in which some ambiguity existed over who was in control the child's behaviour. Horror stories about children's behaviour on their visits to the nursery would often be recounted in the staffroom. Reassurances would usually follow from other staff such as, "She'll be alright when the parents have gone". When parents were present, staff felt they were unable to control directly the behaviour of the children. Instead, the staff developed strategies to indicate to parents how the children should behave. One method was to tell the child what to do:

> Mrs. Judd:"When we're at school we do it this way." And hope the parent catches it from there and learns by experience.

This strategy was used by Mrs. Judd to establish routines, procedures and standards which were offered as a 'way to do things'. Mrs. Terry offered another example

of this process as a means of challenging the behaviour of a mother who was, "doing everything for them [children]."

> Mrs. Terry: I say, "we try not to do that. We'd like the children to dress themselves."

Routines are an essential part of the establishment of relations between parents and teaching staff. It is a way in which staff try to negotiate how situations are defined. Thus, it is a way to cope with potential conflicts which the presence of parents in the classroom may produce.

I have shown above that parental behaviour in class posed a threat to the interests and concerns of staff. These concerns and interests were aspects of their general desire to control their work situation. Contradictions between goals related to parents and children led nursery nurses, in particular, to question their role in relation to parents. I have focused on the strategies and adaptations that the teaching staff made due to the presence of parents. Control of their working environment remained a major theme for teachers. For a better understanding of why it is such a dominant issue, we need to look more directly at teachers' experiences of parents and how they link with their occupational culture. Hargreaves points out that researchers have tended to:

> underestimate the significance of the teacher's culture as a medium through which many innovations and reforms must pass, yet in that passage they frequently become shaped, transformed or resisted in ways that are unintended and unanticipated. (Hargreaves:1980: p126)

How then does the occupational culture of teachers and nursery nurses affect their experiences and shape initiatives to involve parents?

Professional discretion: a justification for autonomy?

Woods (1983) has argued that teacher professionalism contains ideological constructs which are designed to establish and reinforce their position vis-a-vis other groups. Here I will examine a confrontation between parents and teachers, over the use of the staffroom, where teachers employed the notion of 'professional discretion' in order to maintain the boundaries between parents and teachers.

The incident took place at Baker School. Parents were allowed into the staffroom but when and why always seemed open to doubt and confusion. In interviews, teachers said they felt that parents' presence in the staffroom ended any opportunity to discuss parents and pupils amongst the staff. Teachers can talk to teachers about parents and pupils because:

> Mrs. Thompson: You know it wouldn't go any further because you're all professionals doing your job. You've got to be able to sit in the staffroom and say things about children, parents, between staff, professionally, that you know wouldn't go any further because you're all professionals doing your job. You can't say it to parents, or any other outsider. A member of staff from another school, someone from county office, an advisor or someone, are professional but a parent or a dinner supervisor isn't. You have to be careful what you say, it could be taken as slander when you're only being honest. It's wrong for others to know. I mean a doctor wouldn't discuss your case with a cleaner.

Parents or any other 'outsider', were not professionals and so, the logic goes, their discretion could not be relied upon. This view is further illustrated in an account one teacher gave of an incident in which a parent had overheard the teacher discussing another parent.

> Miss Christian: Well, there were problems [with having parents in the staffroom]. It's difficult because you really have to think about what your talking about. It's very difficult because people, parents, are not always discrete. And if you're talking about somebody, you might not be talking about their child, you might be talking about their best friend's child, well, it can be very...I mean I've made big blunders. I came in at break time one day and started talking about a child in my class. I wasn't criticizing him but I was saying that he'd got problems at home, and everybody knew about them. And I was making a judgment about the parents, which I still think is valid, but afterwards I realized there was someone in the staffroom, you know, I shouldn't have said what I did. But it makes it very hard for the staff.

The openness of the staffroom was seen to contradict the need for professional discretion.

Both Mrs. Thompson and Miss Christian implied that only professionals could be relied upon to be discrete in discussions of incompetency, parents could not. Eventually, parents were only allowed in the staffroom at certain times (when staff would not be using the room). Burgess (1988), in his research on the experiences of a school 'going community', also noted how teaching staff employed the notion of professional discretion the ensure their staffroom was not used by the community. My study confirms Burgess' findings and reveals how the openness of the staffroom can lead to a reinforcement of the division between parents and teachers, school and community.

Woods (1979) in his study of Lowfield School noted the importance of the staffroom as a place where teachers could relax, be themselves, and leave their official roles behind. This physical division which the staffroom provides was important to the teachers of Baker School. The absence of parents from the staffroom gave the teachers 'private' space where they could relax, drop the image they felt they had to maintain with parents and not have to be careful about what they said. It is interesting to consider staffs' perceptions of the public areas of school (where staff must present their official roles) and the private areas of school (usually the staffroom) and how they relate to parental involvement. In Chapter Four I will show how the kitchen in Nursery Four became a private area for some staff. It was an area

where some nursery staff would take time off and relax from the role of 'teacher'. Teachers could be found mucking about and having a laugh with parents or sharing an illicit cigarette with one of the mums. What is important about this example is that it illustrates that parents do not have to participate exclusively in the public areas of the school. Teachers are actively defining what are public and private areas and parents can help create a back region (Goffman 1959), a private area where teachers may leave behind their official roles. Whilst parents presence may facilitate teachers pursuit of their private selves, they may also be seen to hinder some teachers' desire to be seen as competent.

Competency

Another important aspect of this analysis is the division between the public image of teachers and the reality of teaching. Some teachers and nursery nurses feared being seen by parents as incompetent:

> During lunch time, Mrs. Thompson began to tell Mrs. Small how a letter from a parent had gone missing. The parent had written to the school saying that she wanted her child to see the child abuse video. However, the child had not seen the video. Mrs. Thompson concluded that the letter must have been lost, as neither the Head nor the secretary knew where it was. She puzzled over what answer she could give to the parent. "What's the point in parents writing letters?" she asked. During this conversation Mrs. Stafford [a dinner lady and parent] entered the room to use the first aid kit. It was clear she had heard all that the teacher had just said. When she had left, Mrs. Small turned to Mrs. Thompson and told her that she must be careful what she said in front of the

> mums. The conversation could be relayed to the mother who had written the letter. Mrs. Thompson seemed bemused. She pointed out that she had not mentioned the woman's name.[21]

Mrs. Small wanted to be sure that parents did not learn of such incompetencies. Such an incident reflects the discrepancy between the image and reality of teaching which staff must learn to manage when parents are involved in school. We have already seen, in Chapter One, Mrs. Small's own concern that parents see her as organised because of the implications this has for her image as a competent teacher. After the 'slip' in which I told her that a parent had felt the workshop to be disorganised she used other occasions, where demands on her time had not allowed her to prepare the workshop, to demonstrate to parents the realities of the pressures on teachers. Other teachers employed other strategies to cope with the discrepancy between the image and reality of teaching.

The disorganisation of some nursery teachers in Allestree School was the butt of jokes between the teachers concerned and parents who regularly attended the nursery. Joking about their disorganisation was a way in which teachers were able to distance themselves from their role. They could disqualify themselves from features of the teaching situation -namely being organised.

While Mr. Wit could use jokes to admit to his own failings, he was aware that the incompetencies of other

teachers should not be the subject of discussion with parents. Mr. Wit, on making a rather scathing remark about a fellow teacher in front of a parent, added, "That wasn't very professional of me!"[22] The term professional can be used to indicate the behaviour staff feel is acceptable and unacceptable to pursue in the presence of parents. Within Allestree School, teachers were also aware that an understanding existed amongst colleagues that a certain competent image of teachers should be maintained in front of parents. Colleagual solidarity was paramount.

An important process in parental involvement is the pressure on staff to maintain their image as competent, organised, professionally discrete. The issue here is how staff cope with discrepancies between this image of nursery nurses and teachers and the reality. Teaching staff may revert to the rhetoric of professionalism to maintain divisions between themselves and parents in order that parents do not observe any discrepancies between the image and reality of staff. Some staff may directly inform parents of the realities of teaching such as the demands made on their time. Other teachers may use strategies to allow the image and reality of teachers to co-exist, for example, through jokes. In the final part of this chapter I look specifically at nursery nurses experience of parental involvement. It is not only teachers who are concerned about being seen as competent by parents.

Nursery Nurses occupational cultures and their relationship to parental involvement

As we have seen the desire to be seen as competent is a very important element of the culture of teachers, particularly at Baker School. David Hargreaves has noted that teachers are sensitive to observation by other adults:

> Like sexual activity, teaching is seen as an intimate act which is most effectively and properly conducted when shrouded in privacy. To be watched is to inhibit performance. Most teachers simply prefer to work alone with a class of pupils. There is no doubt that this reflects the professionals' concern for autonomy. (Hargreaves:1980:p141)

I feel that it can be misleading to see this desire of teachers not to be watched as a concern for autonomy. With reference to parental involvement, I feel the desire for autonomy reflects in part the pressure on staff to maintain a professional image.

Data from my own study would seem to indicate that nursery nurses also felt inhibited when they were watched:

> Mrs. Goddard: I can remember when parents first started to come to the nursery, I found it was quite hard. If I was reading a story, and there were parents there, I found it hard. I don't know why. Perhaps because I thought they were listening or perhaps because they were talking in a loud voice and it distracted me. Or just because they were there and I felt on show all the time, and they were out to watch the things I said.

A parent's gaze can induce stress and anxieties about competency. This led some nursery nurses to feel they were being judged or criticised.

> Mrs. John: They [the parents] always make me feel that they're just sitting, watching, in a critical way. Most of them come round. The ones that sort of get stuck in and doing things with children don't bother me. It's just the ones that sit about and they like watch, but they make me uneasy. Yesterday afternoon, there were four of them in there and at one point Martin's mum wasn't doing anything with Martin or her baby. She was just sittin' watchin' and it's kind of off puttin'. The one's that will come in and go and play with them in the water, go and play with the children, they don't bother me so much. It's just the ones that sit and watch. I just feel they're just watchin' and waitin' for me to do something wrong.

And this led to a feeling of inadequacy.

> Mrs. John: I think it's me, it stems from me. I feel inadequate to cope with parents. Leave me with the children and I'm quite happy. But when I've got parents there, instead of just doing things, I think about what I'm doing more but think about it in the wrong way. I'm more bothered thinking what they think of me, than just doing it how I would do it any way. I just feel put on the spot.

When Mrs. John started work at the nursery she became very conscious of her actions. In particular, parents' presence affected the way in which she related to the children:

> Mrs. John: I find them [parents] very off putting in the way I relate to their children. I feel as if they're sort of, not trying to pick me up, but if I say something like, "Oh,

> you need to put an apron on", or something, they're thinking, "is there any need to bother?"

This experience is shared by other nursery nurses. It is not simply teachers who are concerned about being seen to be competent by parents. Like the teachers in Baker School, parental presence raised questions about competency for nursery nurses in Allestree School.

Parental involvement: A threat to the role of nursery nurses or a facilitator of its development?

Research to date has argued that nursery nurses feel parental involvement is a threat to their own role with nursery children (Watt 1977: Ward 1982). Others have argued that all nursery staff feel threatened by parental involvement because of the low status of nursery education (Heaslip 1985). In order to address these issues I was interested in focusing on the relationship between parental involvement and the occupational concerns and interests of nursery nurses. These concerns and interests included status, pay and power vis-a-vis nursery teachers. It became apparent that different perspectives existed amongst nursery nurses at Allestree School concerning the effects of parental involvement on their status and work.

Mrs. Judd, the NALGO (National Association of Local Government Officers) representative at Allestree School, pointed out to me that the 1989 NALGO pay agreement outlined that 'contact with parents' was a part of nursery nurse's job description. However, both she and Mrs. Fern acknowledged that this could be a point of conflict for nursery nurses and the teachers they worked with. Mrs. Judd argued, "Some teachers don't like it [parental involvement] in some schools". However, she felt parental involvement could actually increase a nursery nurse's status and influence within a classroom.[23] This provided a contrast with previous interview material which indicated that some nursery nurses felt parents' behaviour undermined their position.

The issue of nursery nurse and teacher standing has a significant influence on the experience of parental involvement. There was a good deal of resentment amongst the nursery nurses that their pay was on a much lower level than teachers. For example, the maximum wage a nursery nurse could obtain in 1989 was £7,692 , this was the starting wage of a probationary teacher. Thus wage levels were seen as an inadequate reflection of the differences between nursery nurses' and teachers' work experience and abilities. It was not simply pay differentials which were seen to perpetuate inequalities between teachers and nursery nurses. The idea of different levels of responsibility for nursery nurses and teachers was seen to be something of a fallacy in

practice for some nursery nurses. Both Mrs. Judd and Mrs. Fern argued that the teachers they worked with did not feel that they, as nursery nurses, carried out a different job to the teacher's working in the nurseries.[24] However, it became clear this did not simply imply that the teachers felt that the abilities and skills of nursery nurses and teachers were equal. One of the teachers in question, Mrs. Beam, argued that because of the nature of the school's population the work they carried out in the nursery was more of a social than educational nature. She felt that in many ways nursery nurses were better qualified for the social side. The nursery nurses, however, were keen to point to the similarity in their work.

> Mrs. Judd: The only difference that there is supposed to be is that we [nursery nurses] don't do the register or write reports. But we could write reports standing on our heads. Mrs. Beam [the teacher] always asks me about their [the children's] behaviour - how they eat- because I saw more of them at dinner time. She didn't know. So they pick our brains and all they do is write it down in their own words! Registers, we do the registers when they're away. NALGO told us we shouldn't that's a legal document - but, of course, you do it.

Whilst nursery nurses were keen to highlight the similarities in the work of teachers and nursery nurses, parents and teachers often reinforced the divisions. A newly appointed nursery nurse felt that in her old school the parents had related to her on a social level and the teacher on a 'professional' level. Many parents took on board the distinction between nursery nurses and

teachers. Indeed, some parents saw nursery nurses as trainee teachers. "She's dead unsociable. I don't think she'll ever make a proper teacher".[25] Parents tended to distinguish between the two members of staff they found in their child's nursery, by the degree to which they behaved like a teacher. Parents were often wrong. There was an occasion when Mr. Wit discovered that Julie, a parent, had mistaken Mrs. Beam for a nursery nurse. The incident became something of a joke. The joke being that a teacher could be mistaken for a nursery nurse and conversely that a nursery nurse could be mistaken as a teacher! Mrs. Beam brushed off the incident, arguing to Mrs. Judd, her nursery nurse, that there was nothing wrong in being mistaken for a nursery nurse. However, Mr. Wit's reaction revealed the extent to which, in practice, teachers felt the position of nursery nurses was inferior to their own. This story was retold on various occasions when parents were present, including Julie, which conveyed a certain message to parents about the comparable status of teachers and nursery nurses.

In theory, parental involvement can be seen as a way of widening the role of nursery nurses within a school but this is not without its problems. Not all teachers want to pursue parental involvement initiatives. Thus, attempts by nursery nurses to extend their role by pursuing parental involvement may, in effect, compound their sense of dependence on teachers. Conversely, pursuing this element of their job could put nursery

nurses in a more powerful position, if it is the school's policy to involve parents. Indeed, this view was taken by Mrs. Judd and Mrs. Fern.

In conclusion, the daily experience of parental involvement has to be seen in context. The reality of teaching, lack of resources, time and space, limit the actions which staff can take regarding initiatives to involve parents. Parents were typed by the degree to which they helped or hindered the process of teaching, for example, maintaining the routine organisation of the classroom. Staff were concerned to maintain control of their work situation. There were a number of aspects of this concern: their self-image, work load, stress and enjoyment; and parents were seen to enable, as well as retard, the pursuit of these concerns. It is the difference between the image of teacher and the reality which is of vital importance in understanding staffs' experience of parental involvement

Teachers' experiences have to be understood in terms of the pressures they feel to maintain a certain image - someone who is professional, competent and organised. Nearly all experienced some conflict between this image of teachers and the reality of teaching. As we have seen teachers developed different strategies to cope: maintaining the physical divisions between public teacher and private person, giving parents a more realistic view of the reality of teaching, or passing the discrepancy

between the image and reality with a joke and thus distancing one's self from the image of teacher. Parents were also perceived by some teachers to threaten their private selves. This contrasted with other teachers who pursued their private selves in the company of parents.

Parental involvement also raised concerns for nursery nurses regarding their image. Parents were seen by some nursery nurses to threaten their status yet others saw parental involvement as a way of improving their status and responsibilities in school. Overwhelmingly then, for teachers and nursery nurses alike, parental involvement was both a curse and a blessing!

It is clear that the adaptations which staff make to parental presence, and the strategies they develop, vary greatly. How parents cope with this when they become involved in their children's school will be the subject of the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

1. Research has already highlighted the way in which Head Teachers are able to create an identity for the school (King 1978; Burgess 1983).Parental involvement was an integral part of the identity Mrs. Black, the Head teacher, sought to create In Allestree School.

2. Mrs. Black believed decisions about the policy and organisation of the school were made collectively through collaboration and consultation. (Although many staff felt the Head made the decisions and then tried to convince the staff.) At a staff meeting on Creative Writing, Mrs. Black commented, "I wouldn't want you to feel I was telling you what to do. Nobody would want anybody in this

school to do anything they didn't want." The policy to involve parents was seen as part of what all staff wanted. Mrs. Black commented at the same staff meeting, "I'm sure you have bad days where you think, 'I wish I was at that school' (a reference to a school where parents are banned) but with parents, we've moved in a way we all wanted to go."

3. It was Sir Keith Joseph who originally referred to the 'cycle of deprivation' in a speech made to the annual conference of the Pre-school Playgroup Association (P.P.A 1972).

4. From a report produced and entered for an award.

5. Field notes 22.10.87.

6. Field notes 1.2.88.

7. As this incident over the Governors' Report indicates, teachers were not always successful in maintaining such barriers. However, it is reasonable to assume that incidents where teachers' concerns regarding community relations are not consulted, it may actually serve to reinforce views and 'fears' regarding home-school links.

8. Field notes 23.2.88.

9. Field notes 18.3.87

10. The Governors Report at Baker School June 1987.

11. I am aware that I am using a rather static and stylized view of typifications and not a dynamic model which would take into account how these types emerged and the importance of context. Like Woods (1979) however, I feel it is important to look at the nature and common themes of these typifications.

12. Field notes 3.9.87.

13. Field notes 27.11.87.

14. Field notes 14.10.87

15. Field notes 9.2.88.

16. Field notes 7.3.88.

17. In Allestree School's Nursery the children were seen by some teachers to predominantly require social rather than educational training in these early years.As a result they felt they spent little time formally educating the children.

18. According to a survey published by the A.M.M.A. Infants' teachers are spending less time teaching (a shift from 58% of their time teaching in 1971 to 44% of

their time in 1990) Jim Campbell one of the researchers said the Educational Reform Act had, "diverted teachers' time and energy away from work with children - the main source of job satisfaction for most Infant teachers - and towards the less satisfying activities of meetings and preparation." (Independant;26/6/90;p8) What implications does this shift away from classroom teaching have for teachers' willingness to involve parents in education?

19. See Chapter Five for an account of mothers' experiences of their involvement in school.

20. Field notes 16.2.87.

21. Field notes 10.2.87.

22. Other researchers have noted the distinction which teachers make between professional and unprofessional conversation. Burgess (1988), reflecting on an interview with a teacher at Bishop Mcgregor School noted:

> When I asked to meet [teachers] for a tape recorded conversation, people invariably wish to move out of the Common Room where, as one teacher put it, "I can talk in an unprofessional way" by which she meant name colleagues and provide perceptions of situation. (Burgess:1988:p142)

There is an understanding, within the teaching profession, that boundaries exist which demarcate what one should and should not say to someone outside of the profession.

23. Evidence in Burgess, Hughes and Moxon's study of education for under fives in Salford, indicates that, "some heads had extended the role of nursery nurses by giving them responsibility for home-school links" (Burgess et al:1989:p154)

24. In Burgess et als study (1989) some head teachers saw the nursery nurse as having less responsibility regarding curriculum planning.

25. Tony, a parent in Nursery Two.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORKING LIFE OF THE SCHOOL: AN IDEAL EXPERIENCE?

The theme of this chapter is the understanding parents reach as a result of their involvement in the education and schooling of their child. It treats as problematic the whole notion of parental understanding as both a goal and consequence of their involvement in school. Two fundamental issues raised in my research are: What do parents come to understand through their involvement? How do they reach these understandings? I will begin by tracing the notion of parental understanding.

What do we mean by understanding?

Educational research has indicated that it is important for teachers to explain their aims and policies to parents in order to foster understanding between home and school (Improving Primary Schools I.L.E.A. 1985: Better Schools D.E.S. 1985). But what is this understanding which parents gain? In the definitions of partnership outlined in Chapter Two all, save accountability, imply that parental 'understanding' is a visible indication that they are aware of, and in agreement with, the methods and aims by which their children are taught.[1] There is agreement, then, about

what parents should understand. The contentious issues surrounding what parents understand are: How do parents come to reach such understandings?[2] What is the motivation behind the intention of securing such understanding? [3]

I argue that we need to establish what parents seek to understand about school instead of researchers imposing what they mean by 'understanding' onto the researched (for example, Tizard et al 1981: Clift et al 1980). This means not simply focusing on a parent's ability or inability to 'understand' school methods. There are other understandings which parents reach as a result of their involvement. What parental involvement means will vary from parent to parent. Taking this into consideration, I was determined that my study would not be another piece of research which looked primarily at the 'failure' of parents to reach an 'understanding'.

Parental interests and concerns

Parents interpret their understanding of school based on their prevailing concerns and interests. Overwhelmingly, parents were interested in, and concerned about, how the school worked ('what's going on') and how to help their child.[4] In this chapter I will trace how parents pursued these concerns predominantly through their experience of the working life of the school.[5] There were many kinds of parental

concern, such as: 'doing the right thing'; relationships with teachers; equity and dignity; self-image and enjoyment.

Parents were able to pursue these concerns and interests by both the informal (non-educational/working life of school) and the formal (educational) context in which they were involved in school. It became clear, however, that the access and opportunities which parents had varied between Baker and Allestree schools. Parents also felt the opportunities to pursue their concerns were affected by whether their child attended a primary or secondary school. It is this last issue I will explore first. I will look at the status passage which parents experience when their child begins school, moves from primary to secondary school, and the impact it has on their self-image.

Parents' self-image: experiencing a status passage.

Parents described how, when their child started school or when they transferred to secondary school, they experienced marked changes in: their status and roles; the expectations required of them; and the treatment they received. Such changes have been characterised as status passages (Glaser and Strauss 1971). Such passages entailed a loss of influence and power

regarding their children's education and a change in parental identity and sense of self.

I became aware of the status passage, which some parents experienced when their children began secondary school, as I interviewed mothers who attended the drop-in at Baker School. Several of the mothers had children who were either at secondary school or about to begin. The mothers commented on how secondary schools seemed less approachable than primary schools:

> June: That's what I mean by the personalized touch. If you've got a worry [at this primary school] you've only got to walk in and everybody's there to help you.

She compares the 'personalized' touch of Baker Primary School to the secondary school her eldest son attends.

> June: You get no satisfaction there. You meet a block.

This sentiment was echoed by other parents.

> Viv: You can just come into this [primary] school you've not got to fight to get over [your views and concerns].

> Chris: The only time I'd like to know [what's going on] is when they get to secondary school. When they [staff] refuse to tell you.

This group of parents felt they would experience, and indeed some had experienced, a status passage when their child transferred from primary to secondary

school. No longer would parents, as a group, be able to discuss matters easily with the staff and exercise some influence over their children's education. In the secondary school, they were simply 'blocked out'.

The dominant feature of this status passage was the different treatment which parents felt they received from both their children and teachers. Such status passages entailed, for this group of mothers who regularly attended the school, a loss of perceived privileges and influence.

It would seem, therefore, that parents do not simply follow the progress of their children through different educational institutions. Instead, parents are continually interpreting the meaning of their role and the action they should take. This is clearly indicated in the transition of a child from primary to secondary school. Bastiani suggests:

> It is at times like these, such as starting or changing schools, that relationships are made or broken, when important attitudes or patterns of behaviour are laid down for the future.
> (Bastiani:1989:p98)

I will now focus on how parents experience their children starting school for the first time.

A new identity? Parents' adaptation to school.

When parents first take their children to school they must learn to become part of the collective 'parent' rather than the individual mother and father of their child. It is a process by which a parent's role and status changes. This status passage consists of three main phases: anticipation; ambiguity; and adaptation.

Anticipation

All parents were able to recall the anticipation of their first visit to school with their child. This was an emotional period for some parents. It involved a concern for their child's well-being, a fear that their child would not behave properly and also worries about an impending change in their relationship with their child.

> Julie: You don't know what you're enterin'. It could be a school full of ogres!
>
> Mary: Everyone worries on their way over [to school for the first time]. What shall I do if he swears?
>
> Veronica: I was frightened. Didn't like leavin' my little baby - someone else takin' 'im and teachin' 'im different ways.

Cleave et al (1982) have noted the significance for the mother of a child starting to attend school. As part of their study of nursery education, Cleave et al visited and interviewed a number of mothers before their child began nursery school:

> We found that while a few had viewed the transition [to school] with equanimity, most mothers saw it as a mile stone in their own lives. Emotions ranged from dismay: "It'll be such a wrench when he goes" to elation, "I'll be able to start living again". (Cleave et al:1982:p98)

As the above passage illustrates, mothers have different views on how desirable this status passage is. When their child began school many mothers went through a phase of ambiguity regarding their status in relation to the child.

Ambiguity

Anticipation is followed by a period of ambiguity. This is the time when parents note changes in the way their children relate to them. Particularly, parents notice the change in the influence and control they exercise over their child.

> Veronica: I was the only person in his life. Now it's , "Wanna go nursery". One time he was terrified, used to squawk, now he looks forward to going. He has three weeks off, he turned 'round to me and said, "Goin' to nursery today?" I felt a bit disappointed that he didn't want to stay at home.

Veronica described her fears about her child starting school. Her child was showing increasing signs of independence, and here she reflected on the time when he was more dependent on her. Typical parents in the 'ambiguous' stage of their status passage became very conscious of a changes in their role. Here Jane

describes her experience of her first visits to the nursery with her child:

> Jane: You feel that probably you shouldn't be talkin' to em [your children], it's your child but you shouldn't be talkin' to 'em because you don't know if they should be doing something else. It seems strange. When you're over home you know exactly what to say. When you're over here you say, "Well, you'd better ask your teacher. Forget about me, go and see what they say." Which is right really. You've just got to get used to it - someone tellin' your child, whose always been told by you, what to do. Just the whole change from bein' your own boss to someone else's. Helpin' if you like.

Like Veronica, Jane noted the change in her influence and control over her child. However, it was something she had to 'get used to'.

Adaptation

In the period of adaptation, parents accept that their role is changing in relation to their child. They are also adapting to their new role in the collective group of 'parents' when other roles come into play. Parents are aware that they are being categorised as 'interested' or 'uninterested' parents; as 'interfering' or 'helpful' parents; and so on. How they then adapt to this new role has obvious implications for their relationship with their child's teacher and how the teacher comes to perceive them. In accommodating to the roles expected of them they have

to be sure that they are 'doing the right thing' in the teacher's view. Here a woman describes how she coped with the threat the teacher posed to her influence over her children and still managed the impression she gave to the teacher:

> Kay: You've got to like the teacher to leave the kids. Typical example. If I sing a song to Karen I'm the one that's wrong, not the teacher. I walk in and say, "Hey, Jack [Wit] are you learnin' my boy the wrong song?" "No!" And your sort of goin', "Yes, you are". "No, I'm not." Karen will say, "Mr. Wit knows, he's always right." Nobody takes offence. That's how you've got to be. [6]

Parents have to learn new rules and norms of behaviour. This is part of the establishment of behavioural patterns between parents and teachers. In order to create and maintain a favourable image with their child's teacher, parents have to learn the rules and routines of classrooms and what strategies to adopt. In this way, they may learn how to exercise some control over the situation without threatening their image as a 'parent' with the teacher. Parents need to be aware of how the teacher defines situations in the classroom and then calculate the 'risk' (to their own image) involved in classroom activities. It is to these two aspects of 'doing the right thing' I now want to turn - learning the rules and routines of the classroom and developing strategies to pursue their concerns and interests accordingly. I will begin with specific

reference to the process of establishing relations between parents and staff.

Doing the right thing: How parents manage their self image with teachers

It became apparent in my observations of parental involvement that most parents were concerned to know the teachers' conception of the classroom so that they could act competently and - 'do the right thing'.

Here I want to focus on how parents learn to 'do the right thing' and manage their self image when their children attend the nursery. I will contrast the experiences of parents who were familiar with the nursery with parents whose children had just started school. 'Familiar' parents develop a working knowledge of teachers and nursery nurses and the rules and routines of the classroom.[7] We would assume that 'familiar' parents are more able to define what counted as acceptable parent behaviour.

Beynon and Atkinson (1984) point out that when people face strange situations in unfamiliar settings they recognise that initial encounters are important. As Beynon and Atkinson note: "early phases may be of considerable significance for the members success or failure and their 'moral career' in the organisation"

(Baynon and Atkinson:1984:p256). New parents wanted to be sure that they were 'doing the right thing'. Familiar parents would act as 'guides' indicating to new parents the established pattern of activities in the nursery.[8] For example, when Irene first visited the nursery she was not too sure what to do:

> Irene: Couldn't move off the seat. Just sat there and watched.
>
> L.W.: What made you do that?
>
> Irene: Well, you're in a strange place and you don't want to put a foot out of place. Oh, better not do this, better not do that.

By the third visit, Irene had begun to mix in with familiar parents.

> Irene: I saw the other mums that come up (to school) and they were movin' and doin' what they wanted so I thought, it don't matter. If they're doin' it, I suppose everyone can do it.

The familiar parents in Nursery Four moved around the classroom helping clear tables, making tea in the kitchen and often having a cigarette. Familiar parents increased the speed with which new parents learned the situational rules of the classroom and also the idiosyncrasies of the teaching staff. Parents soon began to feel a part of the class:

> Irene: You feel a part of everything that goes on when you start talkin' and minglin' in. Helping to make the tea.

The presence of familiar parents allow new parents to observe the routines and discover what teaching staff regard as acceptable parental behaviour. Characteristic of parents in this nursery was their tendancy to sit and observe for short periods of time before joining in. This contrasted with parents in Nursery Two which had no such familiar parents present.

> Josie: I used to help put on the kids' coats when they were going out to play. Little things like that. Otherwise, you couldn't really help much. You feel a bit out of place tryin' t' help, pokin' your nose in.
>
> L.M.: Pokin' your nose in?
>
> Josie: Interfering, that's how I felt.
>
> L.M.: Did you feel like that?
>
> Tony: Yeh, you daren't do nowt in case you do it wrong. You just didn't feel settled in. Well, I didn't.

Interfering is a key problem in the establishment of relationships between parents and teachers. Parents who were in classrooms without familiar parents were more likely to feel unsure of what they could do and less likely to feel a part of the classroom.[9] However, the question needs to be raised as to the extent to which familiar parents are simply passing on to new parents the staff's conception of the classroom.[10]

Raising concerns with teaching staff -a risky activity?

The actions of familiar parents can give new parents clues on what is and what is not a risky activity. Here Julie, a familiar parent in Nursery Three, displays her understanding of what counts as a legitimate concern:

> Julie: She [a new parent] should realise [that] kid's get paint on them, no matter what somebody says to 'em [the children]. The more she's like that the more she'll get Jack's back up.

Implicit in this is not only what parents should not be concerned about but also how to show a concern. Here Julie observes the 'mistake' some other new parents have made:

> Julie remarks to Mr. Wit, "I don't think they'll [the new parents] come again, they're complaining." Mr. Wit comments on the image that the two mothers and father, perched on a seat, conjure up for him. "It's like having the Munster Family watching you!" Julie adds, "I bet you thought that of me?" Mr. Wit leaves the kitchen and Julies tells me that she was never made to feel like that. She had felt very welcome. But, she reasoned, she had not complained. The new parents had complained today that the climbing frames were too high and that the teacher had not been watching the children sufficiently. Julie felt that those parents should just have taken their child away from the apparatus. That is what she had done when she first visited because she also had felt that the apparatus was unsafe.[11]

Whilst Julie felt that the parents' complaint was legitimate, she felt it was inappropriate to display their concern in such a way. Mr. Wit's reaction had confirmed her belief. As she commented, in a later

interview, "They got off on a wrong foot with Jack [Wit] anyway because they complained about what he did." Julie was only too aware of the importance of creating the right impression with teaching staff. Julie herself had 'had a go' at Mr. Wit when her child first started school. She had been told by a parent that the children had been allowed to paddle in a pond. After 'having a go' at Mr. Wit she subsequent discovered that she had been misinformed and had, "made a prat" of herself.

Julie now felt 'having a go' was not an appropriate way of raising concerns:

> Julie: He's [Mr. Wit] approachable. You've not got to yell and shout at him to get through to him. You can just say it and if he thinks what you say is right or he thinks you've got a point, then he'll say so.

The art of raising concerns is an important strategy for parents to learn. In some situations 'having a go' or a 'full frontal' (Atkin et al 1988) is seen by parents as the best way of rasing their concerns. This occurs when parents and staff view a situation differently and when staff do not appear to be listening to the parent's view. This strategy for raising a concern is only followed when parents are sure of their information (Atkin et al 1988) otherwise parents may prefer to fish for more information. For example, Veronica had been told by her child that he

had been hit on the head by a member of the teaching staff. Here the parent sought more information on the matter in a way which would not threaten the staff's view of her:

> Veronica: If I'd come in and said to Ruth, "Did you do that? My kid turned 'round and said you did this to him." [She hits her head with her hand.] You'd have felt daft because she'd turn 'round and say, "Look! We may do some thing's in this school but we don't smack kids. That's one thing we don't do. We don't smack children." She said,"I don't know where he got that from." But if I'd have come along accusing [them] then that would have caused a rift.

When parents are not sure of the information on which their concerns are base., instead of confronting the staff they will, like Veronica, 'fish' for information.

'Having a go' and 'fishing' for information (like Atkin et al 1988 'full frontals' and 'nagging' problems) describe two ways in which parents expressed and pursued their concerns. Parents would only 'have a go' when they felt sure that there was something wrong. Where the nature and definition of the concern was not clear parents tended to 'fish' for more information.

These were general ways in which parents pursued concerns. There were other ways parents developed of raising concerns which related to their knowledge of what form of interaction was appropriate for an individual teacher. Here, I will look at the

established pattern of interaction between familiar parents and Mr. Wit in Nursery Four -'having a laugh' - and how parents used it to gain information from, and relay information to, the teacher.

Having a Laugh

Later in this chapter I look at how this practice of having a laugh became a source of personal satisfaction for both parents and teachers. However, 'having a laugh' was also a means by which parents in Nursery Four 'sussed out' Mr. Wit and raised concerns.[12] We have already seen how Kay, a mother in Nursery Four, engaged in banter with Mr. Wit in order to raise an issue she was obviously concerned about - the increasing influence of the teacher on her child (see page 181). Other parents used 'having a laugh' as a strategy for finding out more information from Mr. Wit. Emerson (1969) illustrated how in hospitals humour could be used to transcend official arrangements and lead to private agreements. Indeed, parents were able to use the contrast between 'having a laugh' and 'being serious' to convey their strength of feeling about an issue. For example, Julie commented that if she asked to have a quiet word with Mr. Wit, "He knew there was something wrong."

While parents would use humour to influence the behaviour of Mr. Wit, he equally employed this strategy

to influence the behaviour of parents. Mr. Wit was able to use this established form of interaction as a way of talking about potentially sensitive issues, such as a child's misbehaviour. As Woods has noted, "norms themselves are expressed through humour as part of the socialising of a new recruit" (Woods:1979:p213). Humour was used by Mr. Wit to mark out the boundaries of acceptable behaviour to regular parents.

This strategy of Mr. Wit's, to use humour to influence parental behaviour, can be contrasted with staff who 'show up'/'put down' parents. Teaching staff who treat parents in this way violate parents' desire to be treated as equals and with dignity. I shall examine such situations through 'stories'.

Equity and Dignity

Parents are concerned that they be treated fairly by teachers, allowed dignity, and afforded equity. In this section I am going to focus on the stories parents told me of some of the 'horrors' committed against them by teaching staff attempting to influence parental behaviour. These stories were vital in revealing parental understandings of their relationships with staff. Stimson and Webb (1975) have argued that stories are themselves part of the process by which individuals make sense of past events and present circumstances.

All the stories, which parents told, have one common theme, parental concern for their own dignity and equity in encounters with staff. As Hilary Graham notes:

> In a situation of inequality, both honest stories and fabricated tales are resources by which informants can redress the balance of power.(Graham:1984:p120)

I was interested in these stories for what they indicated about parental interpretation of their encounters with teaching staff and also what they revealed about the norms parents felt applied to interactions between parents and teaching staff.

I have concentrated on those stories in which parents have felt 'shown up' or 'put down'. Gross and Stone (1964) argued there are three functions of embarrassment or being 'shown up'. First, as a means of socialising people. Secondly, as a negative sanction. Finally, as a means of establishing and maintaining power. It is the latter use of embarrassment which I wish to focus on. What I am looking at, then, are the strategies employed by staff to establish and maintain control of parental behaviour.[13] As Gross and Stone note, "The scene may be laid for embarrassment so that only by following the line established by the one who sets the scene may embarrassment be avoided" (1964:p15). Staff then establish a 'line' to be followed. What is important is a parent's reaction to

this strategy of teaching staff and what it reveals about their own concern to be treated with dignity and equity.

Horror Stories about teaching staff

A number of parents talked of situations in which they felt that the teachers had illegitimately 'had a go' at them. In telling these stories the integrity of the parent is affirmed. They are predominantly portrayed as innocent victims of the misuse of power. Here is an example of a parent receiving a 'put down' from a member of staff.

> Brenda: Once when Mrs. Bloor was here, I was standing with the children by the sand pit. One of the children chucked sand into the other kid's eyes. I said, "You're being a very naughty boy." And she [the teacher] walked by and said, "These people who stay at this school think they own the place don't they?" I felt I shouldn't be there then! So when I'm 'round 'er I don't tell any one off.

Mrs.Bloor was reminding Brenda of her place by indicating the boundaries of what she considered to be appropriate parent behaviour. Such behaviour did not include parents reprimanding children for their conduct. Brenda checked her behaviour as a result and consciously altered it in future encounters with this member of staff. But it is not only 'put downs' which staff employ to keep parental behaviour in check, they also employ the strategy of 'showing up' parents. This

extract from my field notes is a good example of how a teacher in Baker School was able to, very overtly and effectively, alter a parent's behaviour.

> Both parents sat watching Mrs. Small [the teacher] demonstrate how various rods, beads, puzzles, shoe strings and plastic shapes of all colours could be employed to help children learn to count. Sue [one of the parents] sat with her head resting on her hands. Mrs. Small stops talking about the mathematics equipment and inquired after Sue, "Are you bored?" Sue's cheeks coloured immediately. She sat bolt upright and stated emphatically that she had been listening. Mrs. Small continued. As Mrs. Small talked, Sue nodded her head in confirmation that she was paying attention. [14]

Like a pupil, the parent was 'shown up' in front of other parents in order to demonstrate that a lack of attention from parents would not be tolerated. A similar incident of rebuke happened to another group of parents at Baker School. June (the ancillary at Baker School) and Lesley (a member of the drop-in) describe what happened when Lesley had taken June a drink of tea.

> June: She [the teacher] threw her [the woman taking the drink] out [of the classroom] with a cup of tea. (Laughs)
>
> Lesley: I know, I felt I was back at school I did. "OUT!" I felt about that big. [Her finger and thumb an inch a part.]
>
> June: This is what annoys me, they talk to you as if you were seven years old.... sometimes. And they talk as if you've got nothin' up here. [She points to her head.]
>
> Lesley: I got one foot in the door and that was it "OUT!"

June: That cup of tea had been coming to me for at least six weeks and nothin was said at all. Until this particular day when she said, "OUT!". It's a wonder the door's still on it's hinges.

Lesley: I never got me foot inside the door. (All laugh) She slammed the door in me face, nearly had the cup of tea all over 'er.

Both in the above account from parents, and the previous account where Brenda's right to reprimand a child was questioned, staff were defining these parents' actions as unacceptable. In both of these incidents, the parents felt that they had acted reasonably. In both cases the actions which were questioned were part of what the parents regarded as their routine involvement in school. The parents' expectations of how they should behave had been questioned. Woods (1975) argues that the person exposed in this way will experience an assault on their identity and feel confusion since their previous identity had been based upon other peoples' expectations of them. The reactions of the parents show two of the possible outcomes of being 'shown up'. The parent can either turn the situation on the staff, as did Brenda, and make him or her the subject of derision. Or, as is the case with the last group of parents, attempts were made to redefine the situation as not serious by laughing about it.

In all these stories teaching staff are portrayed as powerful. Powerful enough to be able to limit a

parent's behaviour and to redefine rules about what parents can and cannot do. Teaching staff are exercising what the women perceived to be illegitimate control over their actions since they were unable to justify the staff's actions towards themselves. A nursery nurse may criticise a parent for chastising a child but, for the parent involved, this did not justify questioning her very presence in the classroom. In the June and Lesley horror story the teacher gave no justification for her action at all.

The staff in these stories had overstepped the rules of behaviour which these parents felt to be appropriate. Teachers have the power to challenge such rules of appropriate behaviour and to question routines which parents may have established .

A feature all these stories have in common is that parents question teaching staffs' actions and reactions amongst themselves rather than actively challenging the staff. These incidents become stories to be recounted to other parents, and sometimes laughed at. The teaching staff are portrayed as the irrational, the parents as the innocent victims - in such a way the parents are able to redress the power balance. As Stimson and Webb argue:

> Those who see themselves as relatively powerless in a situation can redress the balance by stressing their own human and sensible qualities as against the comic

> qualities or stupidity of the more powerful... by laughing at the professional, he [she] is degraded...one detracts from the power of that person by making him the subject of laughter or scorn. (Stimson and Webb:1975:p107)

Recounting these stories is just one strategy which parents use to cope with grievances they may feel about teachers. As already noted, stories are a way in which people understand past event and recent circumstances. This was particularly noticeable at Baker School. As I outlined in Chapter Three, the school had undergone a number of changes and the Head was perceived as becoming increasingly distant by the 'regular' parents. This, combined with the increasingly marginalized position of the drop-in group, led to conflicts in the women's experience of the school. At the beginning of my research at Baker School, these women had been keen to point out how friendly and personal relationships were at the school. They felt they had a special relationship with the Head. I argue that in order to cope with their experience, which challenged their original definition of the school, the women told stories. The stories described encounters with individual teachers so their overall picture of the school could remain intact. This method of coping with perceived injustices did not involve confrontations with teachers, as such confrontation may have threatened the image the staff held of them and thus their position in the school. Stories are one way

familiar parents learn to cope with experiences which contradict their concept of the school.

Stimson and Webb argue that story-telling is a vehicle for complaint. In effect, they have a social control function since the stories indicated that there was very little the individual could do to change the course of events. Stories indicate to people how to act and behave and what to expect. Powerlessness is confirmed as the conflict is expressed to other people who also have very little power. Dissatisfaction with what has happened becomes dissipated through story telling.

This is a process of which many parents are aware. In interviews, some parents would criticize others, such as those above, who would talk amongst themselves about their grievances with the school, rather than sorting them out with the teachers. Yet for the parents who told the stories, story telling had become their main vehicle of complaint.

In this section we have seen how parental interest in preserving their dignity and equity with staff had been challenged and how story telling became a coping strategy. In the next section, I wish to show how parents concern for equity and dignity led parents to seek, both in the formal and informal context of the

school, relationships with a member of staff who 'understands'.

A search for understanding from teaching staff

Parental notions of a member of staff who 'understands' is a person who will share the parent's definition of situations and who also accepts parents for what they are. For example, one parent in Baker School, whose own education had been limited due to illness, explained how the teachers had understood her situation when she had attended a parent workshop in order to help her child.

> Jane: If I wasn't quite sure of anything, they [the teachers] used to come and tell me and explain to me. They never used to shout it out. They used to explain it to me quiet and that until I got the 'ang of it. So I enjoyed it [being in the classroom] because of that, because they understood how I felt.

Staff who understand will share a parent's view of what is happening but will also accept the parent's presentation of themselves. The following horror story indicates how important it is for parents to feel that staff 'know' and 'accept' them.

> June: I think that it's good that parents should help. But if there is a good reason why you shouldn't.....Like I've been nagged at about going on a Tuesday to help my daughter [at the workshop], but there's no point in me going. I'm dyslexic. I can teach her so much, if it gets to a word I'm not going to stick my hand up in the classroom

> and say, "Miss!". I'll do it at home. My husband tells me, and I'll do it in front of Fay [her daughter] and it doesn't bother me. But I couldn't do that. And they [the teachers] won't understand it. They won't accept.

Another account of the importance of staff trying to understand a parent's view of what is happening, and also accepts a parent for who they are, is given in Cath's description of the nursery staff:

> LW How would you describe Cath [Mrs. Singleton, a nursery teacher]?
>
> Cath: They're understandin'- they've got no barriers with them.
>
> LW: In what way are they understandin'?
>
> Cath: It doesn't matter what you say to 'em, they will sit down and they will work it out we ya. Say, for instance, you couldn't afford somethin'. They're the sort of people they'd say, "Here!" [offer money]. They understand that she hasn't got it. That's how they are understandin' and they do it for ya. Yeh, they are very understandin'.
>
> LW: In what way are there no barriers?
>
> Cath: If you want to say, "Look! I don't think that's bleedin' right." They don't look at you as if to say , "God, she swore! How dare she?" They'd probably say, "I'm bloody sick of this meself."

The above description encapsulates all the elements of a member of staff who tries to 'understand'. It is someone who listens to, and is sympathetic towards, parents. It is a teacher, or a nursery nurse, who accepts a parent's definition of what is happening, and their own presentation of themselves, as well as indicating this to the parents through the actions they

take. This represents the parent's view of an ideal teacher. It has a similar pattern to staffs' views of parents who understand. They are parents who share staffs' definitions of what is happening and what is to be done. They are also parents who accept the staff for what they are and what they do. Both staff and parents are seeking in each other some understanding. A concept of understanding which is inextricably linked to their notions of ideal parents and ideal staff.

It is interesting to note how parents notions of a member of the teaching staff who 'understands' are linked to their own experiences of education. In Allestree School parents mentioned two stereotypical images of teachers which were linked to memories of their own teachers. These 'myths' served to mark the boundaries of what they felt to be acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The themes which emerged in their descriptions related directly to their notions of teachers who 'understand' and their desire to maintain both dignity and equity in relationships with staff.

Mythical teachers: Parents' biographies

Parents in Allestree School often referred to teachers who either "do not bother" or who were 'stuck up'/'snotty'. As with the teachers' use of parent stereotypes, these myths revealed parental concerns about, and interests in, their children's education.

Further, they formed a dynamic in parental understanding of parent-teacher interactions.

Teachers who do not bother

A recurring issue amongst parents from the Allestree Estate was whether teachers actually 'bothered' with the children when they were at school. One father commented on the 'interest' the teacher had shown in his son when they had met at a parents' evening. He contrasted this with his own experiences of teachers:

> John: Some don't bother. They think, "They're the Allestree lot, 'dregs', not worth bothering with."

This experience was common amongst parents.

> Melinda: The teachers didn't seem to bother, they let ya ga' on wi' it. Throwin' rubbish, fightin' the teacher didn't bother - just told ya off and that were it. We used to lark about a lot....They didn't bother if ya were there, learnt or what, just teached you and that were it. They always went to the bright 'ens, those who could do it, and sat wi' 'em.

Parents fear that the teacher may not be 'bothering' with their own child.

> Tony: They don't even sit and learn 'em the alphabet, numbers or owt like that they just leave 'em to paint and draw. It's all wrong really. I thought school was school and you go to learn, it don't matter what year your

> in. Like, I'm not that brilliant at spelling or owt like that, my fault was that you were left free - willy nilly - to do anythin'. And I think it's all wrong really. You've got to be pushed sort of thing.

This mythical teacher highlights the importance to parents that teachers indicate, through their behaviour, that they understand parental concerns about the education of their child.

"Stuck up" Teachers

As well as the teacher who was not bothered there was also the 'snotty' or 'stuck up' teacher. Parents use their own experiences as pupils to give meaning to the actions of their children's teachers. Here, a parent talks of how her first impressions of her child's infants teacher were changed when they met at a parents' evening.

> Julie: She expressed her views. They were more down to earth than I thought they would be. I thought she'd be more stuck up. But she's good with the children, she is in some respects on their level. When I first met June [another member of staff] I thought she were [stuck up]. Well, I suppose she is really, but she doesn't make you feel as though she is. She's been brought up very proper - properly, and she likes to see other children brought up like that.
>
> LW: Down to earth? What's a stuck up teacher like with kids? Did you have any at school?
>
> Julie: Talks down to ya, as if you don't really know what your talkin' about, although you did. But they did actually make you feel that you didn't.

> Sue: I tried to talk to 'er...Then again, I've always been very common and Mrs. Smith always seemed very stuck up to me.

A feeling of inferiority was instilled into parents by the 'stuck up' teachers they encountered during their own education and those they met at their children's school. These interviews hint that the parents felt teachers saw them as inferior in terms of intellect and social class ('I've always been very common'). 'Stuck up teachers' were not 'on the level' but talked down to you. Being 'stuck up' was, for some parents, a quality of being a 'teacher', it was what made teachers 'teacher-like'.

> Jill: Teachers talk down to ya if your a pupil or a parent.
>
> LW: Talk down to ya?
>
> Jill: I can only give you an example. If a child goes to school with no socks or dirty trousers, the teacher shouldn't go to the parent and say, "You should bring your child to school a bit better dressed". They should ask if the parent's got a problem, if they can help.... Talking down, is when you get second-hand comments like, "I don't think Jane should wear that to school." Some teachers don't wait to listen to you to explain. They don't listen, they just go off to talk to other teachers behind your back."

Such teachers render parents voiceless. Parents feel teachers like that are not willing to listen to them.

> LW What makes her stuck up?
>
> Sue: I don't know, she just seemed to turn her nose up every time I went to talk to 'er.

LW: You said she was snotty?

Lisa: Sometimes you know, it's her attitude.

Lynn: Whole attitude. All these little things that add up. You can be talkin' to her and she'll switch off and then you don't know where you are with 'er. Especially if you are talkin' about your own child and she suddenly turns 'round and says, "Karen has eaten her dinner Lisa."

The mythology surrounding of the stuck up teacher links very closely with these parents' idea of a good teacher. In essence, an ideal teacher is someone who treated parents as equals and tried to understand them.

The nature of the relationships which parents develop with staff is very important to a number of parents - particularly in terms of the personal satisfaction they derive from their involvement.

Personal satisfaction

Another aspect of parental concerns and interests, in their experience of the working life of the school, is personal satisfaction. It was important to parents that they enjoyed their time at school. Exploring this sense of personal satisfaction revealed a great deal about the motivations and experiences of parents when they became involved in the classroom.

"I like a laugh and a joke - cheer yourself up"

I have already pointed out how humour can be used to establish norms regarding how parents behave. A crucial aspect for some parents' search for personal satisfaction in school was a desire to 'have a laugh'. Humour also provided a release for both staff and parents from tensions and anxiety. It was also a way of establishing and developing relationships. I will begin by describing behaviour which was typical of 'having a laugh'.

Having a laugh was an established form of interaction between Mr. Wit and the 'familiar' parents in Nursery Four.

> Ellen: You can have a laugh with 'im (Mr. Wit] and at 'im.
>
> LW: What do you tend to laugh about?
>
> Ellen: We just take it out of 'im in general. Like when he's got his white trousers on, (he wears a rather tight pair of trousers) but that's takin' it out of Julie [another parent who embarrasses easily] as well as 'im. 'Cause we make 'em both blush. [15]

Causing someone embarrassment was a key aim in this banter. Other parents, as well as Mr. Wit, were fair game. The following extract from my field notes is typical of such 'laughs'.

> A little boy then comes into the nursery with a message for the Jack Wit [the nursery teacher] who at this point is in the toilet. Julie [a parent] tells the little boy to knock on the toilet door. Jack opens the

> door, still drying his hands, and takes the note. "It's a good job I didn't get a knife out and push that tape off", comments Julie. [There is masking tape over the key hole on the out side of the toilet door]. "You wouldn't have seen anything if you had," remarked Jack. 16

Sexual innuendos were a common theme in the joking and horse play which formed a central part of the 'laughs' in Nursery Four.[17] Predominantly these 'laughs' took place in the kitchen. They centred on Jack Wit's constant flutter in and out of the kitchen as he carried out various jobs: filling the tumble drier; keeping an eye on a cake. What then did the parents and staff get out of having a laugh?

Social Bonding

'Having a laugh' was a way in which parents and teacher could establish and develop relationships. A 'teacher' may be strict and not very approachable, but there are some members of staff who you 'know' you can 'have a laugh' with.

> LW: What do you know about Jack Wit that you don't know about Karen [an infants teacher]?
>
> Sandy: You can have a laugh with Jack. The typical thing is, "I didn't think you were comin' in today". And it's two minutes past nine. "Oh shut up!" [she replies]. Whereas I don't know Karen that well to tell her to shut up. Maybe she would be that type.

Woods (1979), in his study of pupils at secondary schools, concluded that all pupils feel it is important

to be able to share a joke and have a laugh with a teacher. He comments,

> During such incidents, pupils and teachers were seen to transcend the institutions and become human. (Woods:1979:p178)

Laughter becomes a mechanism for staff and parents to step out of the behavioural patterns they feel is expected of them. When teaching staff had a laugh they were also able to treat parents as people and not as parents. As this extract from my field note indicates:

> Jack Wit [the nursery teacher] left the kitchen and walked past both of us [myself and Julie] as we both stood admiring her new baby. "Ugly baby", commented Jack (known for his sarcasm) on his way to the toilet, "It's not surprising with parents like that", he added. Julie, with a big grin on her face, shouted as he closed the door, "You're supposed to have respect for parents."[18]

When having a laugh, teachers were able to step out of the behaviour expected of them. Hence, as Coser has argued in reference to relationships between nurses and doctors, it is "the banter and joking which help further to cancel out status differences" (Coser:1958:p57). Jokes and banter are ways in which parent-teacher relationships can become personal and unique. However, such joking relationships only occurred between Mr. Wit and a group of mothers who regularly attend Nursery Four. The extent to which some parents were outsiders to this kind of banter and relationship illustrated by Lynn who was not a regular

in the nursery. She described, with great astonishment, how she had walked into the classroom to find Mr. Wit being chased by a parent around the classroom. The mother (Ellen) was threatening to douse Mr. Wit with talcum powder. Lynn began her story by exclaiming, "I didn't know he was like that!". Yet all the regular parents did know he was 'like that' and the antics which they got up to made sense to those involved. For many of the women it reflected the laughs they had experienced at school and at work.[19] A joke and a good laugh continued to provided joint relief, for the staff and mothers, from the day-to-day routines.

A release from tension

It is necessary to look at why 'having a laugh' was so important to women in both of these schools. Whether the 'laugh' took place in the classroom with the teacher, in groups on their own at the drop-in or in the sanctity of the kitchen in Nursery Four, the women seemed determined to 'have a laugh'.

> Ellen: You know how you get a crowd of women and you can talk about things and you can have a right laugh.

Laughter provides a release for these women.[20] It became clear that 'havin' a laugh' with other women was predominantly a means of helping women to cope both emotionally and with the routine of housework. One

women described what they joked about as they sat in the classroom drinking coffee.

> Julie:We have a laugh that we're not goin' home and doin' anythin'.

What I have sought to illustrate by this reference to women's desire to have a laugh in school is that parental involvement is rarely an altruistic act. We cannot assume that parental involvement is simply focused upon the needs of the child - a desire to improve the child's educational progress. While for many parents the child's education is the primary motivating force, parents' own personal satisfaction in the situation is also a fundamental concern for them. There are two inter-linking strands to parents' personal satisfaction - enjoyment versus boredom and doing something versus doing nothing in the classroom.

Enjoyment

Parents had to visit the nursery with the children when they started school. Not all parents enjoyed this experience. Thus, this was an opportunity to explore this aspect of parental involvement in the classroom.

Some mothers in Allestree School enjoyed their involvement with children in class. Through it the women gained a sense of achievement, a feeling of

importance and a sense of reduced restrictions on their behaviour.

> Melinda: It's nice when you see the kids can do things and you've sat there and helped them.
>
> Louise: I enjoy giving the children a push on the swings. Makes you feel important.
>
> Tracy: I enjoy helpin' the kids makin' things with them, 'cause it helps them learn.
>
> Brenda: You can get involved with the kids can't ya? It was nice. If this one (her son Grant) didn't hang 'round ya you could play with the other kids. Do what you liked...Draw a picture if you wanted. We used to do cooking...
>
> Sue: Do what you wanted more or less. You don't go stupid like. You've got to keep your head. I enjoy the kids.

The freedom which the mothers felt nurseries afforded them referred not only to a feeling of being able to pursue any activity. Freedom meant being able to pursue these activities without the constraints of their own child. This was an experience specific to the women who visited. Here I want to explore the notion of enjoyment and its links with the experience of involvement in the nursery classroom. This focus revealed the importance of locating the experiences of involvement in terms of the gender and class of the parent.

'I like kids'

Firstly, enjoyment was linked to the behaviour of one's own child and secondly to whether the parents actually liked being with other peoples' children:

> Val: I liked it when Philip [her son] was here but to some extent I thought, "Oh, do I have to stay?" I'd talk to another kid and he'd [Philip] get ever so mad with me. He dominates me. Now he's gone to another class it's better.

This woman regularly attended the nursery. Since her 'dominating' son moved to an infant's classroom she was able to enjoy her involvement with the other children more. The enjoyment which many of the women felt they derived from staying at the school was linked to 'liking kids'.

> Melinda: I enjoy it. I like kids anyway.

> Linda: When I was at school meself I used to go and help at nurseries so I like playin' with the kids - it never bothered me. 'Cause more often than not I was on me own. She'd [her daughter] go off playin' with somebody and I'd got all the other kids round me playin'. I'd end up buildin' lego houses or helpin' cuttin' out or somethin'. I didn't mind who I was with.

> Karen: It were great. I never used to have Helen, she wanted to play with her own mates, she didn't want me. So I just sat there playin' with the other kids.

The women enjoyed their time at the nursery because of the opportunity to both be with, and play with, other children. The fact that their child did not need them

or want to play with them was not a crucial issue in the parents' experience and enjoyment. This is in contrast to parents who were 'bored'.

'I was bored'

Parents who were bored by their involvement did not express delight at the thought of joining in with, or supervising, their own or other peoples children. Their motive for being in the classroom excluded reference to the enjoyment of children.

> Tony: You're in school but you're not there, if you get what I mean. You're there if they need you but if they don't need you then you're alright. I think that's where the schools got it all wrong really 'cause you've got to be with the kid.

> Mary: If Vicky had needed more time to settle in I would have to stay. If she'd needed more time settling in I wouldn't be bored, I'd have been too busy settling her in. Because she was settled in I guess that's why I was bored.

Both of these parents did not enjoy their time in the nursery. Both had come to the school with the single intention of settling their child. Both felt redundant since their child did not seem to need to be settled in any more and the actual process of settling them was characterised by its basic inactivity.

> Tony: It was very boring 'cause you didn't want to go and interfere with the kid. Well she's...if you want to her settle in school really...'cause she's gonna rely on you to be there all the time.

Tony and his wife felt the purpose of their presence was to settle their child into school. This meant they left their child to establish its independance from them - to become less reliant on their presence in the classroom. Both saw themselves to be acting as 'invisible' parents. "You're in school but you're not if you get what I mean". Neither Tony nor Mary expressed any enjoyment in helping other children in the nursery.

> Mary: I was bored stiff. Couldn't wait 'til I'd not got to sit there.
>
> LW: Why was it boring?
>
> Mary: It's not interestin'. Others find it interest in playing with kids, learnin' 'em. When I'm out me 'ouse I'm thinkin' what could I be doin' in the 'ouse?
>
> Tony: It wouldn't be too bad it you had somat to do. It isn't...You can enjoy some things but you can't really sit in a classroom full of kids reading a paper. They're gonna go and play and their gonna come 'round ya, sittin' on ya knee. Like I had one gal, the first couple of days I want up, sittin on me bloody knee. And she wouldn't ga' off!

These parents did not like playing with the other children. They had come to school with the intention of settling their child into their classroom. Both felt redundant in their inactivity. These parents shared a dislike for interfering in their children's play. They

preferred to sit and watch. So far, parents can be distinguished into two categories dependant upon:

1) Whether they enjoyed or were bored by the idea of playing with their children or other children.

2) The degree to which parents felt they should intervene in their own and other children's play activities.

I will look at both these issues further and the questions they raise about the influence of class on the experience of parent's involvement in the nursery.

Perceptions of play

Boulton (1983) has carried out a study of middle class and working class women's patterns of mothering. She argued that middle class and working class women had different perceptions of their involvement in play. Working class mothers were more likely to play with their children for general enjoyment and when they were bored with playing they would turn to other activities. Middle class mothers, whether they enjoyed playing with their child or not, played with their child out a sense of duty. The women's experience of their involvement in the nursery reflected class cultural experiences of child rearing. We have already seen how women decided

whether or not to take part in their children's play was dependant on whether they enjoyed it or were bored by it. However, the cultural character of formal education reflects the middle class view that it is a parent's duty to involve themselves in their children's education. Parents who do not fulfil this duty are labelled negatively by staff.

Intervention

The Newsons (1968) have argued that parental interventions in their children's play differs with the social class of the parent. They argued it was the norm for working class parents to have minimal interference in their children's play, except where quarrels posed the threat of physical injury. Indeed, both Mary and Tony ('bored' parents) did not believe in intervening in their children's play.

> Tony: Like we don't play with them at home as such do we? [addressing his wife] We let them do their own thing, try and make 'em more independent, to do things for themselves instead of havin' us around all the time.

These parents invested greater independence and responsibility in their children at an early age. 'Bored' parents adopted this non-interventionist strategy in the nursery. This could have reflected their cultural view of child care and resulted in a perceived redundancy.

In contrast, the middle class approach to collective play was characterised by the Newsons as situations where, "the whole sphere of interaction is supervised by a watchful adult" (Newson,J and Newson,E:1968:p134). This description is more akin to the experience of parents who 'enjoyed' their time at the school who would sit with groups of children and supervise and join in their 'play'. Parental behaviour which reflects the middle class patterns of child rearing were more likely to be seen in a positive light by teaching staff than those parents who were: bored with their visit, do not want to interfere, and let their child get on with it. The latter parent was inevitably labelled as wanting to 'get rid' of their children.

Parents who are bored by their visit expressed a reluctance to intervene in the behaviour of other children in class. Janet Finch (1984) in her study of play groups organised by working class mothers argued that, "disciplining another woman's child is, in working class cultural practices 'real dynamite'" (Finch:1984b:p128) This inability to intervene in children's behaviour was a factor often cited by 'bored' parents for their discomfort in the classroom.

For example, Mary said she did not want to stay in the classroom once her child had settled, "I'm not one for kids". She went on to say:

> Mary: All the kids come to me [at home]. I can't get rid of them. I don't mind. I'm dead strict with 'em. I think that's why they come back for more.
>
> LW: Why are the children at home different from here?
>
> Mary: I can't throw them out [into] the garden!

Similarly, Cath had felt she could not stay in the class because she would not have been able to check the behaviour of the children.

> LW: Would you ever think of coming in to the classroom at any other time?
>
> Cath: No, I've got patience with the kids but that (reference made to a child screaming in the background) I'd just go shut up - things like that. No, I'd never come.
>
> LW: If you felt you could shout "Shut up!" would you come?
>
> Cath: Oh, yeah! I'd be here straight away. I love kids.
>
> LW: It's interesting that - not being able to tell them to be quiet when you want them to be.
>
> Cath: I wouldn't tell them to be quiet. I'd say "Shut up you brat!". You can't speak like that, can ya?
>
> LW: You feel you can't talk like that here? Why's that?
>
> Cath: Not to other people's kids. They'd probably think, "Who's she? Calling my kid a brat!"

Like Finch's play group leaders, these parents lacked an alternative model of how to intervene in the behaviour of other people's children. This combined

with a cultural taboo regarding the supervision of other people's children and led such parents to decide not to be involved in their children's classroom.

Cath's explanation of why she did not want to stay in her child's classroom was more complex than the teacher's analysis (she wanted to get rid of her child') and had its roots in cultural practices and norms of child rearing. Not all parents who were reluctant to intervene in their children's behaviour were 'bored' by their involvement. Another factor in parental enjoyment was feeling they were they are doing something. [21]

I want to look at a third category of parent. So far we have encountered the parent who enjoys visiting school and those parents bored by school. There is, however, a third category of parent. These are parents who are bored by the experience of school but who 'grin and bear it':

> Ashley: I could see the reason that I had to stay but I was bored.

This group of parents, whilst experiencing their time at school as boring, were concerned with the impression they gave to the teacher. This is illustrated by the example of a parent who attended the Junior School workshop.

> Manjit: It's not that I don't see the point in going to the workshop. I went to the workshops three or four times and I thought, "Well, I'm doing the same thing with Sutinder". I was doing Maths and a little bit of English and not sort of going into other things. Like, er, if Sutinder was doing a different type of Maths I would have felt well they are doing something different. But I used to do it like Maths and English. I would do it at home with her - then I used to feel like that. But then I got on to other things, other sides.

This was a parent who was considered by the teacher to be a model parent and would never be regarded as someone who was bored by the proceedings. Manjit was able to give the impression of being interested by stifling her own boredom. Her strategy was to develop other interests. These newly formed interests included seeing how her child's behaviour changed, how she coped. Still she was bored by Mathematics and English but she reassured herself of the importance of doing these subjects.

> Manjit: It's important to do Maths and English, I think, more than anything else. I know I'm a bit bored.

The implication seems to be that parents can be interested in, and appear to be interested in, their children's education at the same time as being bored by what is going on when they participate.

Parental interest

Some parents are very aware that they must display interest in their children's education to their child's teacher. Evidence of how much the notion of parental interest is linked to parental actions is indicated by this comment:

> Rachel: I think whether you're really interested or not in what they're doin' you should be there. You should be interested. You should make the effort to go if you can ...It just seems like you don't care if you just shove 'em into the classroom and you suddenly disappear. I'm sure the teacher would notice if you did that sort of thing.

Whilst parents feel it important to show interest, what is it that interests them?

Many factors make up what parents consider to be interesting. One recurring theme in both schools was that parents found interesting those things which were new to them - that they had not experienced and shared with their children in the home. As Manjit, the parent who was bored with doing Mathematics and English in the workshop, pointed out. "I would do it [Mathematics] at home with her [child]." Some parents sought activities which were 'new'.

> LW: You said it was borin'.
>
> Sandy: Just standin' [in the playground] and watchin' then outside was borin'. I was alright when there was new things 'cause you're interested in it.
>
> LW: What was new and interesting?

> Sandy: I remember Nicky was amazed by being able to cut things up. Here [at home] I've got sharp scissors - I hadn't got any little ones. He looked at me as if to say, "Can I really?"

Sandy's description of what she found interesting in the nursery focused on something which she had not shared with her child in the home. This is contrasted with Sue's description of how boring it was in the Infant's workshop at Baker School precisely because the experience was not different to what she had shared with her child at home.

> Sue: It was just sort of sittin' about with other children 'round watchin' her colourin' in. It's a bit borin', just there watchin' her. I mean that sort of thing she can do here [at home] and I could be doin' somethin' else while she's doin' it. That's [colourin'] easy. Mary [an older daughter whose workshop she attends] would be getting sums wrong [so she could help her].

These women were bored because what they were sharing with their children at school appeared to be no different to what they did at home. They were experiencing the child in the same way as they would at home. For some parents, this made coming to school seem pointless and so they stopped attending. For others, it meant making the situation interesting in some way; a search for some new experience of their child, in order to maintain the impression of being an interested parent. Some continued to attend simply because their child wanted them to. Other parents chose to attend

parental involvement activities which they felt were 'interesting' that is, not everyday experiences.

> Vicky: I like to see them doin' a play.
>
> LW: Is it different to the classroom?
>
> Vicky: They're doin' somethin different [in a play]. When your child's there [the classroom] it's more interesting. They're doin everyday things in there [the classroom]. What they do at home.

The idea of things being different from the everyday and therefore interesting is one of a number of criteria which parents employ to compare staying in the school with doing other activities. Other ways of evaluating time at school included assessment of their role in the classroom. As we have seen some parents felt their time in the nursery was to break bonds with the child. In order that the child became independent of them in the classroom the parents would render themselves 'invisible'. Such parents questioned whether this passive role was in fact a valuable use of their time.

> Tony: There was nowt to do. I've got plenty to do 'round the house especially with just movin' in. You see we just had to drop everythin' 'cause we'd got to spend a week wi' 'er at school. But two hours in the mornin', two and a half hours, you lose that time off going backwards and forwards to school. You can do a lot 'round the house in that time. If there was somethin' to do at school it wouldn't be so bad. It wouldn't have been a waste of time if there'd been something to do.

This sentiment is shared by others who see their presence in school as a short term intention of settling their child in school.

> Veronica: I was wastin' me time by not bein' at home. So as I'm standin' round doin' nothin' I might as well make the time go a little faster and try doin' somethin - take some staples or drawin' pins out. Get me away from the little 'un a bit too. If I was in the cloakroom and he was in there [the classroom] he knew I wasn't far away.

Here, 'doing something' meant the parent felt she had not wasted her time when waiting for her child to settle. By being in the other room pulling out staples it also helped achieve her purpose in visiting - weaning the child of her presence. The parents who viewed their involvement as passive needed something to do in order that they didn't feel they were wasting their time.

In conclusion, I have sought in this chapter to explore the understandings that parents reach through their experiences of being involved in school. My research suggests that there are a number of concerns and interests which parents pursue during their involvement. Far from a conflict model of parent-teacher relationships, parents seem concerned to 'do the right thing'. They must learn the rules and routines of the classroom if they are to behave 'competently' in the classroom. However, in their encounters with staff, parents are concerned that they

should be treated with equity and dignity. We have seen how 'familiar' parents develop strategies to cope with staff when they disregard this concern. It is clear that 'familiar' parents go to great lengths to maintain their image of the school in the face of conflicting evidence. Parents also revealed the characteristics of an ideal teacher being someone who treated them as equals and was willing to try and understand their views.

Finally, an exploration of parents' search for personal satisfaction has revealed the complex pattern of motivations and intentions which underlie parental experience of visiting the nursery with their children. Whether parents do or do not continue to be involved in the school (after settling their child into the nursery) can be explained in terms of parental understanding of their role in their child's education. Their views of what is interesting and enjoyable about being in the classroom is, itself, influenced by cultural views of child rearing. The complexities of these experiences reveal how limited and misconceived staff's categories of parents are.

Whilst access to 'working life of the school' does not guarantee that parents 'understand' the educational methods and objectives of school (Atkin et al 1988), I argue that this does not imply that it is not worthy of research.

In the next chapter, I will explore further two of the concerns and interests raised in this chapter. A focus on women's experience of their involvement in school which provides a unique perspective on concerns about equity and self image.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Chapter Two 'Partnership in the Making' where I outline the different definitions of partnership.

2. Plowden felt that through their involvement in school, parents would develop their understanding of school and the role they could play in their child's education.

> In school where parents gave practical help of this kind, discussions with teachers about methods used in the school often arises informally over the job and enables parents to understand how schools work and how to help their children more effectively. (Plowden:1967:p 15)

For Plowden the practical help parents could offer presented a means by which parents could learn, and begin to understand, what the school was trying to achieve. Changes to parental understandings were possible in this 'non-educational' context. This assumption has been questioned by Tizard et al (1981), when parents offer their practical help in school, they argue, it does not automatically follow that the teachers will explain the methods they employ. Tizard et al refer to the gap between the parents' and teachers' understandings of play materials in her study of nursery classrooms. She concludes:

> Our evidence suggests that unless efforts are specifically directed to explaining what the teachers see to be the purpose of play materials, most mothers will think the activities are to keep children amused. Visiting or helping in the class will not in itself bring parents closer to the teachers point of view.(Tizard et al:1981:p66)

3. Opinions vary as to why schools aim to secure parental 'understanding' of a school's teaching methods

and objectives. For writers such as Cowburn (1986), this is a way of ensuring the complicity of the working classes in the education system. For others, such as Plowden (1967), securing such understandings were key in achieving the goal of equal opportunities.

4. Atkin et al argue:

> parents' experience of their children's school need to considered in terms of their contribution to a deeper understanding of educational processes and of parental roles within them, rather than being confined to a superficial picture of what's going on. (Atkin et al :1988:p52)

5. As Atkin et al (1988) have noted, 'familiar' parents (parents who have an active and involved relationship with their children's formal education) have access to the working life of the school. They become knowledgeable of individual teachers and the everyday school routines and organisation. However, they argue, few parents get any kind of explanation of what the school is doing. As a result they do not necessarily develop a clear 'understanding' from what they observe and experience.

6. Banter between parents and staff were part of the established pattern of interaction in Nursery Four. This was characteristic of the way in which parents would joke with Mr. Wit and, at the same time, be expressing a concern.

7. Atkin et al define 'familiar' parents as those who have an active and involved relationship with their children's formal education. I go on to argue that what is important in characterising this parent is not so much what they do but the knowledge they gain as a result of their involvement.

8. This process was also observed by Salisbury (1986) in her study of Adult Education classes.

9. Like the pupils in Ball's (1980) account of initial encounters between teachers and pupils, these parents spent time observing before they tested out what they felt they could do in the class.

10. To what degree is Mr. Wit's concept of the classroom mediated by the familiar parents? Certainly, Mr. Wit saw the nursery as a place for parents to socialise. He hoped, but did not expect, that parents would be involved in their children's education. Ironically, the message which some parents perceived from the familiar parents was that it was the norm to socialise in the classroom:

> Clare: You think they're [parents] all looking at you but they're not really. They've perhaps not even noticed you, it's just how it feels.

She then adds:

> Clare: I just feel a bit different. The children, they've always stayed around me, other [mums] stand in the kitchen and let the kids get on with what they want to do.

By spending more time with the child, this parent felt she was breaking the established pattern of behaviour. The teacher did not indicate to parents that they must be involved in their children's education when they stayed. This combines with the indication for familiar parents' actions that the classroom was essentially a place for parents to socialise.

11. Field notes 17.9.87.

12. Somewhat like the pupils Beynon and Atkinson (1984) refer to who attended Victoria Road School, parents 'mucked about' with the teacher in order to collect information.

13. Salisbury (1986) carried out a study of Adult Education classes. Mr. Paris, the French teacher, had commented that adults required, 'a different kind of discipline'. With kids you can say, "Shut up!" or "That's enough now!" but you can't speak like that to adults, can you?' So Mr. Paris used jibes and put downs to control the adults' behaviour, but he made fun of it to lighten the situation.

14. Field notes 18.2.87.

15. In the Allestree School estate, teachers and parents perceived a distinct difference in their life styles. It was all the more important for teachers to utilize shared experiences. In Nursery Four, sexual innuendos became the subject of many jokes and laughs, especially with the mothers who attended the nursery regularly.

16. Field notes 17.9.87.

17. Salisbury (1986), in her study of Adult Education lessons, noted the amount of 'mucking about', rude jokes and 'getting up to tricks' which occurred in Mrs. Baker's cookery classes. She indicated that she includes examples of such incidents because:

> It is surprising. Indeed, as a researcher experiencing, or at least witnessing, some of these events, I was shocked and rather

incredulous that such things happened in adult classes. (Salisbury:1986:p90)

18. Field notes 17.9.87.

19. I would argue, that this desire to have a laugh which parents pursue in their participation in school is part of a latent culture. That is a culture which has it's origins in a group other than the one in which the person is participating in. Willis (1977) has pointed to the integral relevance of pupil counter culture for shop floor culture. In both contexts 'having a laugh' was a way of developing interest in a 'dry' institution like work or school. Similarly, I argue, a group of women in Nursery Four developed, as one of the defining characteristics of their parent culture, the pursuit of a laugh.

20. Indeed, the same comments were made by women in Baker School. "If you don't have a laugh you'd cry. If you didn't have a laugh and a joke you'd land up in tears some times."

21. Julie would not interfere in the children's behaviour. She also felt she was 'doing nothing' at school. But she enjoyed 'doing nothing'. As she once commented whilst sitting in the kitchen, 'I could get used to this'.

Part 3

The neglected reality

In this final part of the thesis I will look at two partners whose presence in home-school relations is taken for granted but whose experiences have received little attention from researchers - mothers and children.

While a fundamental principle of participatory partnership is the need for equity between teachers and parents, we cannot overlook the inequalities that exist amongst parents and the implications these have for the ideals of partnership. Some writers have already acknowledged that parents are a heterogeneous group. (Widlake 1986; Pugh 1984; Atkin et al 1988). Parents can be differentiated in terms of class, ethnicity *and* gender. While researchers have looked at the effects of class and ethnicity on parental experiences of involvement in their children's education, there has been little specific focus on the experiences of women. The predominance of mothers in schools is seen to reflect their role as carers of children. Researchers have made little attempt to explore how the role of mother influences women's experience of their involvement. Research in the last decade which has looked at the experiences of women, in order to uncover and understand the processes of their involvement, has tended to focus on home-visiting initiatives. (Filkin 1984:Raven 1980).

Researchers have neglected to look at how women directly experience their children's school. They have failed to explore the meaning of such experiences and how they

affect the motivation and intention behind women's involvement in schools.

At the same time, children's presence in home-school relations is assumed. They are seen as the ultimate beneficiaries of a partnership between parents and teachers. Again, no one has explored children's views and experiences, just how acceptable do children feel parental involvement is? In the next two chapters I will begin to fill in the existing gap in our understanding of how these forgotten partners experience parental involvement.

CHAPTER FIVE

'IT GETS ME OUT THE HOUSE': HOW WOMEN EXPERIENCE THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL.

The focus of this chapter will be women's experiences of their involvement in their children's education and its implications for the rhetoric of partnership between teachers and 'parents'. This is not to imply that women can be looked at in isolation from issues of class and ethnicity. I want to look specifically at a group of predominantly white working class indigenous women who were the 'regulars' at both Baker and Allestree schools.[1] I argue that their gender and class are both vital in understanding their experience of parental involvement.

Researchers have tended to take women's involvement in school for granted, as an extension of their child caring role (e.g. Haigh 1975). I examine the relationship between women's experiences as housewives and mothers and the experience of their involvement in their children's education. The question which this focus has raised is whether school represents for some women an escape from, or an extension of, the domestic sphere? Feminists have pointed to the importance of looking at the power relations between women and men which produce the division between the public and the private/domestic spheres (Stacey and Price 1981, Gamarnikow et al 1983). Men are associated with the public sphere - the world of

politics, law, the state and so on which is regarded as the world of power. Women are associated with the private/domestic sphere of kinship relations and the care of children characterised by its informal power (Mossink 1984). I want to look at the extent to which school becomes for some women an extension of the domestic sphere and what the consequences of this are.

In the first part of this chapter I will look at how school becomes a resource for some women, an extension of the private sphere, where they can escape the 'work' which home represents. In the rest of the chapter I will look at how the mutual contact women gain from their involvement can become a source of informal power within the school.

School as a resource for women

I have already pointed to the resource which women's presence in school provides for the teaching staff. This is illustrated in Haigh's comment:

> Many housewives are glad of the opportunity to get out of the house to do something useful. It only seems sensible to make use of a situation in which someone else is willing to do jobs which you yourself find irksome and frustrating, not through laziness but because such jobs interfere with what you are paid to do. (Haigh:1979:p79)

I want to look at this 'situation' which teachers are invited to exploit. Is it true that housewives are glad to be "doing something useful"? Why are some groups of women "ready and willing" to help and others not? In order to understand the motivation behind women's decision to become involved in their children's school, we need to look at their experience of their roles as housewives and mothers.

Interviews with women about their involvement in school often turned to talk about their roles as housewives and mothers. In discussion of such roles three themes emerged: the monotonous and boring nature of housework; the isolation it produced; and the constant responsibility which child care involved. I wish to begin with one group of women's responses to these issues; how such issues relate to their motivation for becoming involved in the school and what their resultant involvement has meant to them - the 'dissatisfied' housewives.

'I get fed up at home': The dissatisfied housewife

For one group of women, school provided an opportunity to 'get out of the house'. School was somewhere they could sit, chat and drink coffee together. It is the various aspects of this escape from home to which I will now turn.

When at school, women were able to escape from the monotonous routine of housework:

> Ellen: Yeah, it [going to school] is a break from routine, which is getting up, sortin' kids out, cleaning up, cookin', washin', ironin', a break from all that.

Also they escaped the boredom that they felt:

> LW What's it a break from?
>
> Lesley A break from boredom. You do your housework, you do it every day without fail, so when your doin' it there's not much really to do. So the rest of the time you're just sittin' there. I've got so many labour saving devices that time's heavy on me hands anyway.

Monotony and boredom are only two aspect of the women's dissatisfaction with their role as housewife. Many women spoke of the need to escape the isolation which being a housewife and mother produced. Unlike their husbands, who return from work to rest in the sanctity of home, women have no such escape:

> Jo: If you sit down and knit or watch telly [at home] I feel guilty.
>
> LW: Do you feel guilty if you're at the drop-in then?
>
> Jo: No. If I'm sittin' at home and I'm knittin' I feel guilty. I don't feel guilty....Like I used to take knitting to the drop-in, that didn't make me feel guilty. But I think, I'm sittin' here. I think it's 'cause you're in the surroundings. If you're in the drop-in you can't really say, "Oh, I'll get up in a minute an hoover up", but here [at home] you can.

Hence the women's urgency to be physically apart from home and the work which it represents to them. For some women it is the need to overcome the physical isolation that being a wife and mother often produces (Hobson 1978). Other women felt psychologically that they had to break away from home (Oakley 1974a). Many women spoke of the danger of spending so much time at home that they became afraid of going out of the house. For this reason Ellen felt school had an important role:

> Let's put it this way, if it weren't for the school, Lorraine, the furthest I'd have to go - 'cause all my friends, you know your family friends, they're all at work, so if it weren't for me comin' up to school, the shops would be the only other place I went. So you'd be there you'd clean up, you'd do the dinner, you'd come up to school, you'd pick the children up, you'd go home. And that is it, your life would revolve around comin' to and from school and you'd see people in between to sort of walk up and down, but that is it. It's...in the end you'd get as you don't wanna go out. Now that sounds stupid but it's true. I got like it with Jo. Before Jo started school I got to the point where I've got no reason to go out. Why should I go out? And it's terrible 'cause you don't want to go out and then your kiddies aren't goin' out and that's doin' them no good, it's doin' you no good. It does good to get out.

Experiences similar to this have been recorded in other studies. In Cyster et al's account of parental involvement one mother commented, "School is, for a lot of people, the only place they go other than the shops" (Cyster et al: 1979:p121). Cyster et al, when interpreting the statement, emphasised the value parents placed on the advice and help they received at school. They saw it in terms of what it said about how

approachable parents felt teachers to be; and not the sanctuary it provided for some women from the routine of going to the shops and as the only escape from the home. What I suggest is that time and again the distinct experience of some mothers are overlooked by researchers and that women's statements are all too often generalised so that they supposedly speak for all parents.

There is a further point to be made here. Some researchers have acknowledged that women come to school for their own enjoyment. Ferri and Niblett (1977) recorded:

> the extent to which mothers used the group as a place where they were able and welcome to spend time and enjoy social contact with staff and other mothers -simply the opportunity to sit down and relax, have a cup of tea and a chat. (Ferri and Niblett:1977:p20)

While this is recognition of the distinct experience of women, the women who attended were described as part of what Ferri and Niblett described as a "disadvantaged parent and playgroup". These were the experiences of a group of working class women. I argue that it is in terms of both class and gender that we can best understand the need for these women to use school as a resource for themselves. Boulton (1983), showed in her study how working class and middle class women's experience of their pre-school children varied. She revealed that while half the working class women in her study enjoyed the companionship of mothers in the local community, who they knew through their children, only three of the twenty

five middle class mothers did so. It could be argued, then, that working class women use school as a resource, in this way, as part of their continuing experience of motherhood and socialisation with their peers.

There was a general consensus amongst a group of women in my study that it was "good to get out" of the house. For some women, school provided the motivation to get out of the home and forced them to leave their 'work place'. A sense of isolation, then, was a key concept in understanding the desire of these women to become 'involved' in their children's school. School provides an opportunity to meet people, a context away from the monotony and isolation of home.

Many of the women spoke of how they missed adult company because they were isolated in the home with only their younger children to speak to. At school, the women were able to chat with other women about their worries and problems; have a 'good gossip'; have a 'good moan' mainly about men; and also have a 'good laugh'. However, as this comment indicates, there is an interesting result of such social contact:

> Janet: Me and her have a damn good moan. Walk back in to your house and you feel great, the world's been lifted off your shoulders, let's get that cobweb down I've been looking at for six years.

As studies on factory work have revealed social contact relieves the boredom of monotonous work. Cavendish, for example, noted in her study of women working on the assembly line of a mechanical and electrical components company, that talking with other women made time pass quickly:

> Sitting next to someone made the day pass more quickly. There were a good run of days when Rosemary, Eileen and I chatted and sang songs all day long. Rosemary told us about her family and what her brothers and sisters were doing, then she'd get Eileen to take over and tell her life story. We were all pleased when this happened because the time flew and the next break came quite soon. The conversation itself was almost secondary to passing the time. If you had a new woman sitting with you, or shared a job, that was great because you could sort out short rests between you and the day would pass more quickly because there was someone to talk to. (Cavendish:1982:p116)

In the same way women who had regular contact with other women in school were more able to cope with their work situation. Such contact could result in them working better, as the above quotation indicates, or finding solidarity with other women in avoiding housework. As one woman disclosed to me, "We have a laugh that we're not goin' home and doin' anythin'."

It could be argued that school provides women with much needed social contact, helping women to cope with rather than challenge their experiences as housewives and mothers. To put it more positively, school represents a private sphere which women may escape to and get way from

their place of work. For these women school was often a place where they could create their own space and have time for themselves. In school they may escape from the constant responsibility of child care, as this description of the 'drop-in' group by one of the members indicates:

> Janet: They can sit down and not have to watch the children. I go in there and I'm naturally watching the kids. But if someone else is watchin' them all the time, you can forget they might fall off the chair and split their head open... if you've been keyed up all day you can just go 'ahhhh!' (sighs).

The fundamental obligation attached to the social position of mothers is the constant and exclusive reponsiblity for their children all the time. School provides an opportunity to share the responsibility of child care or even forget about the children altogether. As this mother indicates, in her description of a course she attended at her child's school called 'Child's Play':

> Ellen: Ya sit there and it's just women and ya can sit there and have a good laugh and joke and forget about the kiddies. You can forget all about them for a little while.

School is somewhere women can have mutual contact with each other and minimal contact with men. School also provides physical and psychological escape for women from some of the demands of their roles as housewives and mothers - however temporary and illusory this escape may be.

> Ellen: All right, you've got twice as much [housework] to do the next day. You can get caught up - you can't get caught up on a social life and you've got to have a social life of sorts. So it's a break, break from me routine.

There is an important point to note from the last statement. Women have 'got to have a social life of sorts' (my emphasis) this is indicative of the whole problematic relationship between the role of wife and 'leisure' time. I will return to this theme later and the question of whether school has become for these women a place for 'leisure'.

I have begun to indicate here the experiences of school shared by one category of women. I have highlighted the meaning their involvement has for them by placing it in the context of a dissatisfaction with their role as housewife. Going to school is only one form of escape from the dissatisfaction women may feel in their role as housewives - some women started back at work again, others took up new interests. Some women began to pursue their own education by attending the 'Moving On' course run by a local community college. As one of the organisers of the course noted:

> Mrs. Prince: For many women it is the first time for years that they have done something for themselves. One women said that her motivation on coming on the course was to 'find herself'.

To understand the complexities of women's responses to their involvement in their children's school we need to look further at women's experiences of being housewives and mothers.

As we have seen, in Chapter Four, some women characterized their time in the school as relaxing and providing a sense of escape. Other women felt school to be restrictive and overwhelmingly boring, as we will see below.

In the main, it was the dissatisfied housewife who experienced school as providing freedom and relaxation:

> Julie: Its nice just to be able to sit over there (in the school) and do what you wanna do for five minutes without havin' some one sort of... I mean at home, you've not got a dictator here [at home] but you know what you've gotta get done and what you should be doin'. If its not done then you've got some one comin' back and its er..
>
> LW: So you feel over there you do what you want to do then?
>
> Julie: Well you've got nobody judgin' what your doin' over there. If you have a cup of coffee you have a cup of coffee, it's the done thing in Jack's nursery. No one's goin' to say, "Oh, god! What's she doin' drinkin' coffee in there?" You've got no judgin' goin' on over there at all 'cause you're not at home, well, I don't know. We have a laugh that we're not goin' home and doin' anythin'."
>
> LW: You have a laugh about it?
>
> Julie: I don't get nowt done here [at home] anyway (laughs). I'm not much of a housewife, the mother bit I don't mind, it's the housewife bit I mind.

Again, the contradiction arises between being a housewife and mother, and 'leisure' time. Julie feels obliged to work when she is in the home. This raises the interesting question about how this sense of being judged influences her decisions over what she should do. Or does she feel dictated to by the routine of her housework? There is a different routine to adhere to in the nursery. A routine in which she can sit and drink coffee. For some women, the experience of being a full-time mother and housewife has become a dissatisfying one. School became somewhere they could create a time and space for themselves to do "just what you want".

This is a stark contrast to those women who experienced the school as both boring and restricting. This group of women preferred being at home to being at school:

> Mary : I was bored stiff I couldn't wait not to have to sit there (visiting with a child).
>
> LW: Why was it boring?
>
> Mary : It wasn't interesting - others find interest in playing with kids, learnin' em. When I'm out me 'ouse I'm thinkin' what could I be doin' in the 'ouse?

One group of women I interviewed could be seen as searching for satisfaction in their housewife role. Oakley (1974a) in her research into women's experiences of housework characterized two approaches to it: those women who search for satisfaction in housework and those

who recognize their dissatisfaction. I have already explored the relationship between the dissatisfied housewife and her involvement in school, I now wish to turn to the seekers of satisfaction.

Coping with the conflict between housework and child care

Oakley (1974a) has pointed to the conflict in roles between housewife and mother, for example, children make a mess. Ruth, a mother who had recently visited the nursery with a daughter, illustrates the point:

> Ruth I've got better things to do with my time
>
> LW: What better things can you do with your time?
>
> Ruth May be it's not better than helping the teachers but when you take the children to school you get rid of them so you can paint and that. Lots of things you can do at home you can't do when the bairns [children] are there.

"Getting rid" of the children means that these women have more time to perform their household tasks. Studies have suggested that working class women tend to have a stronger identification with the traditional housewife role -which make it difficult for them to distance themselves from housework standards (Komarosky 1962: Oakley 1974a). In a more recent study Boulton has pointed out:

> The most common type of conflict encountered by women I interviewed was between the responsibilities of mother and those of housewife...Virtually all women in the study coped with the potential conflict by giving priority to children and childcare. (Boulton: 1983 :p85)

A significant proportion of the women in my study, perhaps, strongly identified with the housewife role as this extract indicates:

> LM: Have you seen the adverts on the wall?
>
> Cath: Wouldn't do it anyway, plus I ain't got enough time to do it anyway. By the time ya get 'ome and cleaned up it's time to pick up Jerry. I pick Jerry up do the dinner, clean up again after dinner, bring him back to school. Do aither ya ironin', sewin' whatever ye've got to do. Then it's time to collect the kids again. You just haven't got time. My cleaning takes two or three hours, plus every day I do the same thing, I do all me bedrooms, hoover all me bedrooms. It's like a routine now. I do everythin', so I just ain't got time.

This woman described herself as a 'cleaning fanatic'. The woman outlined her daily routine and the standards and specifications she felt she had to reach. This identification with the housewife role made resolving the conflict between housework and childcare difficult. Nursery school provided the opportunity for such women to limit and contain the demands of childcare and make the conflict more manageable.

It is not only the conflict between the roles of wife and mother that we must look at in order to uncover the complexities of the gender experience of school. Women

need space as well as time to maintain their sense of individuality (Boulton 1983). However, at school, many women felt they were only seen as housewives and mothers.

"Just your child's mum": A sense of identity

> Institutionalised motherhood demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self realisation, relation to others rather than creation of self. (Rich:1982:p247)

When I listened to women's experiences of their involvement in school, it seemed that for some women the demands of motherhood had become more focused. Ellen explained how she felt she had to fight to maintain her own identity:

> Ellen: It's good to get out and it's good to be a person in your own right if you've got friends of your own, I mean your not just Nicky's mam and Jo's mam and Melinda's mam. 'Cause the minute your child starts school that's what you are. You've lost all your own rights and you are a person's mother. Like last week I went up to get a bottle of milk, up the kitchen, up the staff kitchen, and I walked up there and some one shouted, "Mrs. Jones!" and some one else shouted, "That's not Mrs. Jones! "That's Ellen!" and someone else turned 'round and said, "No it's not. It's Melinda's mam." That's how it is, you've not got a name, you're not a person in your own right, you're that person's mother and that's it full stop. And it's nice to be a person in your own right.

In other studies women have spoken of similar feelings. At school they feel they are regarded simply as their

child's mother. One woman in Goode's study, when asked what would she say to the teachers, if she had no fear of reprisal, replied, "I'd tell them, 'I'm not stupid'. That I am an intelligent woman, and not just Jenny's mummy, which is all they see me as" (Goode:1982:p259).

Other women in my study commented on the dominance of their identities as housewives and mothers when in school and they were conscious of what it implied about them. One woman, who previously worked as a nurse, gave an account of an incident in which she felt the Head Teacher saw her as 'just a mother'.

> Jackie: The day I ended up goin' to the City (hospital) I got the impression from Sue (the Head), you're (sic) second best. The girl on reception at the City -I used to work with her. -'cause she said, "Oh, hello Jackie! What are you doing here?" Sue said, "Who's that?" I said, "Oh, I used to work doin' escort duty from the City (hospital) to here". She said, "Oh, so you have worked then!" As though my sole purpose was to produce children and I think that put me off her. That she could think like that! Oh, that you've never worked! I mean there's a lot of people have done a lot of work. I think that's what done me.

These women want to be recognized as more than housewives and mothers because they are aware of the negative connotations associated with such roles.

> LW: How does being a worker compare with being a mum - are you thought of any differently?
>
> Julie:When you're a worker you've got status. When you're a mum you haven't, you're just a wife and mum or you're just another mother. When you're at work you've got status, once you finish work you do lose it.

At work, women have a sense of identity. Ellen described what it had been like to be "one of the gals" when she was working.

> Ellen: Even though a lot of the girls at work were married with children they were all gals. At work you were all gals together. You were married but it was the gals. Where here [her child's school] it's not. You're all dinner ladies, you're all mams, you've got children and you all sort of talk about your kids and your home life. Where as you didn't when you were at work. You talked about your social life, "Oh, I'm goin' out tonight. Do you fancy comin' for a drink?" That's what it were like. We were all like school kids if you like. Even if you were married we used to meet up in town and go for a drink. Where you don't do that [at her child's school]. I mean we're friends to a certain extent but it's not like it used to be at work. You're one of the gals you know you're just one of the gals. You go out drinkin', you don't involve them in your own life too much. 'Cause I mean that's private, what ever goes on in your life, that's private from work. 'Cause a factory, once anythin' [about one's private life] gets in a factory, it goes 'round like wild fire. But you're one of the gals. You go out, go for drinks. You meet comin' home from work, on the way through town, you go for a coffee and you just sit and have a general chit-chat. That's all really, you're just mates.
>
> LW: What are you to each other here [at school]?
>
> Ellen: Well you're friends but in a different light. You're sort of family friends. Like with me and Jo, I've got four kids, she's got four kids, we've both been through similar problems with husbands, so that gives you that bit of extra friendship. She's what I call a personal friend. The girls at work were just gals, they were just your mates."

This distinction between being one of the 'gals' and being one of the 'mams' reflects for Ellen the difference between the public and the private sphere.[2] In the public

sphere, the world of work, women can be one of the 'gals' even if they are married with children. They have a social life which is detached from the responsibilities of marriage and children. The separation of work mate from home life was also noted in Jephcott et al's study of married women who worked:

> Friends at work did not create complications since they could be kept apart from one's private life...."You get a laugh mixing with the girls", says that it reminded them of their girlhood. (Jephcott et al:1962:p11)

However, in school, an extension of the private sphere of home, Ellen indicates that a woman's identity as mothers and housewives affect how they relate to, and are identified by, each other. Indeed, this is confirmed in Sue Sharpe's study of working mothers.

> Exclusion from public life and labour has led to women being defined and described principally in terms of their family relationships, as someone's daughter, wife or mother. This negates self identity and it implies that women only exist through other people... In this context, returning to work offers mothers the opportunity to find their 'selves' again, to have identities separate from the home, to be people in their own right. (Sharpe:1984:p78)

School, like work, can provide some women with a sense of freedom from the isolation and monotony of housework. However, unlike work, school does not provide all women with a sense of their own identity, more frequently, it robs them of it by defining women in terms of their role

as mothers. What school did provide for some of these women was an opportunity for 'leisure' time.

Housewives and 'Leisure' Time

In this section I want to look at the relationship between being a housewife and the opportunity for 'leisure' time afforded by involvement in school. Women's leisure is restricted by the sheer volume of paid and unpaid work they carry out and also, as we have seen, by the structureless character of housework. Women who went to school could have time away from the demands of their housewife and mother roles. However, women who choose to stay at school did meet with the disapproval of other women. One woman was alleged to have said of another woman, who regularly attended the nursery, that "she might as well move her bed in". In Baker School comments were made on the 'tea' group's 'excess' use of the staff room. As one mother, Manjit, observed: "I felt they should be at home cleaning and not sitting there having a cup of tea."

Indeed, the women themselves joked about their absence from housework. "We have a laugh that we're not goin' home and doin' anythin'." This is symptomatic of the problem of being a housewife and mother and the opportunity for 'leisure' time. The question I wish to

address here is: can women's time at school be seen to constitute 'leisure' time?

Research has shown that women tend to spend their leisure time in socially responsible activities (Delamont 1980). For example, Chamberlain, in her study of Fenwomen in the town of Gislea argued:

> Social activities for women must do and be seen to be doing something for the improvement of the community or of themselves as well as providing, incidentally, a social outlet. (Chamberlain: 1975: p.144)

Women's 'leisure' time at school, then, is consistant with the theme of a socially responsible activity. Women make tea and coffee for the teachers, help to run fetes and make costumes. Even a tea bar, that provides drinks for women whilst they wait to collect their children, was organized to raise money for school funds. The drop-in group, which appeared to provide an opportunity for women to sit, chat and relax whilst sharing child care responsibilities, was not perceived in this way by the women. I was surprised when I enquired why the women went to the drop-in, that so many argued it was an opportunity for the children to socialize. The merging of women's 'social' life with their child care responsibilities was also made apparent in an Inner Area Research Project carried out by Midtown's City Council which questioned residents in Allestree about their leisure activities.

> What emerged from this was the popularity of home based activities such as watching television, reading, knitting, and craft and artistic hobbies. A number of women suggested that **looking after the family was their leisure time activity.** (Sills et al:1981:p55) (my emphasis)

Indeed, the women did not participate in any of the activities in the school purely for their own personal enjoyment and pleasure. Women had to be seen to be doing something for the improvement of the school or their child. This is illustrated in the case of Joanne, a mother of four, who described her decision to "do something for myself":

> Joanne: I think I just got fed up of being in the background. It was gettin' as I was in a rut. So I just decided one day that was it. But Miss Frost [the Head] had a lot to do with it. 'Cause she said somethin', she said, "You've done a lot for the children now you want to do something for yourself." The more I thought about it the more it clicked...
>
> LH: What did you do?
>
> Joanne: I started to help with Julie [her daughter] in the workshops and helpin' Melissa [her other daughter]. Then I started at St. John's House [doing voluntary work].

Here, Joanne's feeling that she is 'doing something for herself' actually involved participating in voluntary work for others and helping her children in their education. Delamont has previously made the point that women do not have 'pure' leisure time. She outlined how women's leisure time is based on helping other people and goes on to argue,

> Men work, so men have pure leisure, women do not, in society's view, do real work, so they must be earnest and worthy. Women are thus only allowed leisure if it supports them in their role as wives and mothers, or improves society for the less well endowed. Whether leisure is organized in Rotary Clubs and rugby playing, or disorganized in pubs and neighbourhoods, only men are free to enjoy it as genuine relief from toil. When women become involved in leisure activities which are not an extension of their domestic role, they are subject to scorn, ridicule, discrimination and even violence. (Delamont:1980:p189)

In Baker School scorn was poured upon a group of women who pursued a leisure activity which was neither in support of their roles as housewives and mothers nor for the 'good of others'. One group of women adopted a policy on Friday afternoon of going to the local pub. Instead of attending the drop-in they went, as one woman termed it, to the '*drunk in*'.

Janet, who did not attend the 'drunk in' with the other women, was aware of the dangers such pursuits entailed: "Men go out. Are they automatically accused of trying to pick some one up? No!". Indeed, the women's behaviour met with a great deal of disapproval. Valerie Hey in Patriarchy and Pub Culture (1986) outlines why drinking in pubs is the preserve of male culture,

> The social construction of masculinity, as it is presently defined, requires men to identify with their own sex in an equivocal allegiance that excludes, fragments and abuses the female sex. The pub culture exemplifies this process. (Hey:1986:p72)

This illustrates that women are aware that once they step into the public sphere for leisure activities they can be subject to the penalties of overstepping the boundary from the private sphere. Women are safer to pursue their leisure activities within the private sphere, within the home! However, as Hobson points out:

> It is the isolation within the home and the impossibility of escaping from their place of work to a private sphere that structures the oppression which these women experience. (Hobson:p90:1978)

I would argue that school does provide a private sphere of sorts which (as Hobson feels) is necessary if women are to be able to escape the isolation and monotony of housework. School provides a place where women can have mutual contact, almost to the exclusion of men, and exercise a great deal of informal power. In the rest of this chapter I will explore the power relations between women and men and the division between the private and public spheres.

The division between the private and the public and its relationship to school.

In this section I want to explore the public and private spheres. Instead of starting from the assumption of public men and private women we need to acknowledge that such assumptions are in need of investigation themselves

(Fildes 1985). Do people operate with the notions of separate spheres according to gender?

A common understanding had been reached by the staff where it was taken for granted that by 'parent participation' they often meant 'mothers' participation'. Women were predominantly present because they care for children. In this way parental involvement was seen to reflect the division between the public realm of work and the private sphere of the family.

I do not want to look at the difference in women's and men's participation in school as a reflection of the sexual division of labour. The danger is that the sexual division of labour could be seen as a cause of the different degree of involvement by men and women. Instead, I argue, we need to focus on the nature of men's and women's involvement, and the meaning it has for them, as a reflection of the power relationships between women and men. Imary and Middleton have argued:

> Activities in themselves have no absolute and unchanging value, be they economic, political, cultural. Rather, value is given to activities by virtue of who performs them and, more importantly, who controls their meaning and importance. (Imary and Middleton:1980:p16)

I wish to look at how men attribute public and private status to the structure and processes of school.

Part-time dads

The low level of involvement of men in school has influenced how women's participation, and the activities they are involved in, are defined. Both teachers and women assumed that, by their absence, men felt participation in school was an extension of the mother's role and responsibility for child care. One mother argued:

> Janet: I think probably 'cause his dad never went to his [school] it was always his mum and he feels it is the mums' line to do it. I mean, I call him "part-time dad". He only wants to know when they've been good which is probably true of a lot of fathers.

As I outlined in Chapter Three, teaching staff judge the behaviour of mothers against their idea of how a 'responsible mother' should act. However, as Mayall (1990) has argued, there is no such normative model of what constitutes 'responsible behaviour' for fathers (save perhaps their financial provision for their families). Thus, fathers' involvement in their children's education does not receive the same kinds of evaluations. As Mayall points out:

> What he [the father] does for and with children in the way of care is seen to be a matter for individual negotiation between him and the mother. It is not seen as a matter where public concern is legitimate, except in cases viewed as extreme, such as child abuse. (Mayall: 1990:p327)

Furthermore, men's absence from school lead staff to assume that the men did not value what was done in the schools. One teacher observed:

> Mr Wit: It's interesting how dads particularly see the nursery school. I know John for a fact - what did Julie (his wife) say? He doesn't 'rate' nursery education whereas he 'rates' infant education.

By their absence, men are not simply implying that women's involvement in school is an extension of their roles as housewives and mothers. Men's absence is also taken as an indication of how they value the activity. In this context when men do become involved in school it receives special attention. One play group leader explained, "When a dad comes to the play group we make something of it." Thus men are in the position that, by their very involvement in school it is seen to ascribe status and value to the activity. Indeed, Imary and Middleton have argued that:

> Throughout human societies, what men do is valued above what women do even if both women and men do the same thing in the same place at the same time. (Imary and Middleton:1980:p14)

Even in their absence, men are able to exercise influence over the importance given to an event. What of women's power and influence in school? Stacey and Price suggest that evolution of the state education system, "Should be seen as a removal from the private female domain into the public male domain of an activity in which women formerly had considerable power and authority" (Stacey and Price:

1981:p128). Yet women's power in school, which is substantial, cannot be observed if we only pay attention to formal power structures. As Oakley reminds us, the traditional wife/mother role, "is correlated with certain types of powerlessness, it also has its own avenues of influence" (Oakley:1974b:p14). The predominance of women in school means that it is a domain women share, in which they are able to exercise a great deal of informal power. This includes not only the role women have in influencing the everyday decisions of teaching staff but also their access to formal power in schools. The latter is illustrated in the informal opportunities which a group of mothers had to become parent governors in Baker School.

"You'd make a good governor.": The informal appointment of women parent governors.

The two parent governors of the Junior School in my study were both women. I was fascinated to learn of the process by which the women became parent governors.

LW: Why did you become a governor?

Remila: I was encouraged to. I didn't know what a governor was, I had no idea at all. But she said, "Right, you [ought to] be a governor", and they explained to me what a governor's job was. I said, "Alright".

LW: Who was asking you?

Remila: Some parents and a teacher.

LW: Why did you decide to take it up?

Remila: I decided to take it up so I'd know more about the school. What the school system was. I've always been a housewife, my life is revolving around children - so knowing about school helped me.

Remila felt becoming a governor helped her fulfil her duties as a housewife and mother. What is of particular interest to me here is the informal manner by which she acquired the position. Another parent, Sal, also experienced the informal nomination of parent governors. Here Sal describes how she also helped a friend to take up a position.

LW: You were going to be a governor?

Sal: It came up, they sent letters out saying they wanted parent governors. Jasmine used to be home-school liaison. She asked me one Friday afternoon...she said to me, "The governors are coming up". She said, "We've [staff] had a talk about it and think you'd make a good governor. Do you mind being nominated?' I said, "No." So it was Jan Jones that nominated me (at the drop-in) someone else seconded it and the form went in. Then I was talking to Jan about it and she said, "Well, I wouldn't mind being a governor', I know it sounds a bit silly, so I said, 'Well I nominate you'. Because I thought at the time she would have made a good governor -she probably has. So I nominated her.

The nominations even struck the nominees as rather informal. However, Mossink (1984) and Stacey and Price (1981) have argued that the women's sphere is characterized by its informal power (which may be contrasted with the formal power of the man's world).

Under the Education (No 2) Act 1986, school governors were legally obligated to arrange a meeting for the parents to inform them about the school and the workings of the governing body. In this school, at least, the meetings represented an opportunity for fathers to indicate their interest in the role of parent governor. This role had hitherto been dominated by women. In the meeting itself, only one mother attended compared to nine fathers. At the beginning of the meeting much time was given to questions from fathers about how they could be nominated for the post of parent governor. This kind of detailed information had previously been given to women individually and informally. Women's access to this information had been derived form their position in the network of women in the school. This renewed emphasis on formal access to the role of parent governor leads me to speculate how long women will enjoy their position of dominance in this role at Baker School.[3]

In this chapter I have focused on the experience of working class women who became involved in Allestree and Baker schools. The predominance of "mothers" in school has been taken for granted in previous research as a reflection of the sexual division of labour. Yet I argue it is vital to look at the experiences of the women, in my study, in terms of both their gender and class position in order to understand the meaning and

motivation behind their involvement in their children's school.

Involvement in school represents, for some women, escape from the isolation of home, housework, and the constant responsibility for child care. School provided an opportunity to pursue a 'social life of sorts' even though, characteristically of women's leisure time, it was time spent in forefilling mother/housewife duties and socially responsible activities such as helping teachers, raising school funds and so on.

I outlined in Chapter Four, that parents were concerned with their self image when they participated in school. Self image has a particular significance for women. For many, the role of mother negates their sense of self and, for some, school amplified this feeling. In school, many women were seeking to be seen as people in their own right and not simply as their children's mother.

Some women choose not to become involved in their children's school and their experiences as housewives and mothers are vital in understanding why they make this choice. Their children's attendance at school gave them the opportunity to make the conflict between the duties of their roles as housewife and mother more manageable by containing the demands of child care.

The predominance of women at school provided a place of mutual contact which tended to excluded men. This network of women became a source of informal power for them giving access to, and control of, information which fathers did not have.

While in theory, the principles which underpin the rhetoric of partnership may be the same for all parents; in practice, these principles may have very different meanings for the distinct groups that make up the collective noun 'parents'.

The principle of sharing resources between teachers and parents has a significantly different meaning for women when we focus on what resources are shared, how and why they are shared. We cannot simply focus on the power relations between 'parents' and teachers and search for more equitable relations without acknowledging how the power relations of both gender and class cut across, distort, and shape the relationship between 'parents' and teachers.

In the next chapter I will turn to another social group who have also been neglected in research on partnership. They are the alleged beneficiaries of such a partnership - the children!

FOOTNOTES

1. I acknowledge that there has been much criticism by feminists that women's social class position is assumed to be that of their husbands. (Llwellyn 1981: Stanworth 1983) If I place emphasis on the individual women rather than the household this is fine as long as they are in employment. What of housewives? Do I use their previous job as an indicator? Do housewives class themselves as unemployed?

2. Sally Westwood argues that celebrations of motherhood are an integral part of the shop floor culture of the women in her study. She concludes. "This was another example of the poverty of a conceptual framework which separates home and work and treats them as two separate spheres. It is usually assumed that pregnancy, child birth and motherhood are matters related to women at home, rather than the factory or the work place". (Westwood:1984:p208) Whilst I acknowledge Westwood's point that issues of motherhood do cross the bounds between home and work. Interestingly, for Ellen there is a perceived separation of home and work into private and public spheres.

3. It would be interesting to make a comparison of the gender of parent governors prior to and following the 1986 Act. Figures from the Department of Education and Science, who commissioned a survey of five hundred county schools, found:

Female parent governors	641	50.6%
Male parent governors	625	49.4%

However, I have not been able to trace any figures for the proportion of female/male parent governors prior to the implementation of the Act.

CHAPTER SIX

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?": HOW CHILDREN MAKE SENSE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS.

Little research has been carried out on how children experience parental involvement. There are numerous areas which researchers could explore. For example, what effect does parental involvement have on the way children relate to teaching staff? Does parental involvement help to break down the boundaries children may perceive to exist between school and home? However, in this chapter I will focus on the culture and identity which the child develops in school and how they are affected by their parent's presence. Such a focus will reveal not only how children adapt to, and cope with, parental involvement but also how acceptable parental presence in school is to children. Before looking at the question of culture and identity, however, I want to look at the way parental involvement affects the manner in which a child settles into the institutional life of the school

I will look, here, at the experience of a group of five and seven year olds from Baker and Allestree Schools. These children described their memories, and present experience, of their parents' involvement in school.

The institutional life of school

There are two particular aspects of school life I want to focus on here. Firstly, how the child learns to do as the teacher says, and secondly, how the child learns she is part of a group. These raise the question of whether or not parental involvement helps or hinders the child's adaptation to the facts of school life.

Rules of the classroom

Each activity in the classroom has with it a set of well defined rules which pupils are expected to understand and adhere to (Jackson 1968). Even in the Nursery School there were rules which were well understood by the children. For example, at milk time in Mrs. Singleton's class at Allestree the children would form a circle on the carpet and sit in silence until a child had been chosen to distribute the milk. During this time all the children had to place their hands in their laps so that fingers would not get trodden on. Each child had to thank the distributor of the milk when they received their bottle. Blowing air into the bottle to make bubbles was strictly forbidden. These are just some of the rules of milk time which even children who had only spent a short time in the nursery had to follow. However, such rules would often be disobeyed by a child when his or her parent spent

time in the class. Here is a description of such an incident from one father:

> Pete: They'd all have to sit on a mat and our Ian wouldn't want to sit down. I'd say, "Go and sit down or you'll be in trouble," and he'd stay with me and I'd perhaps be sweeping up the sand or moppin' up the water. Then I'd feel awkward because I knew that Val or Mary [the teaching staff] would have to tell him off. Or I didn't know if they were waiting for me to say something to the child. That's the only time I felt a bit awkward. It would have been easy to have said to him, "Ian go and sit down there or you'll get a smack." But then again, it's not up to me while I'm in the classroom to keep him in check.

In Chapter Three, teaching staff also explained the awkwardness that existed over who should control the child's behaviour when parents were in the class. To what extent are children able to exploit this dilemma to their own advantage? Pete, the father, seemed sure of his child's intentions. "He's obviously playing up and showing off in front of his classmates. Instead of going on the mat, like he should do, he was misbehaving."

In observations I made of other nursery classrooms it became clear that during parents' presence, children would sometimes break the 'rules' and routines of the class. In Nursery Four, the kitchen was out of bounds for the children - but when the mums stood in the kitchen drinking coffee their children frequently took the opportunity to join them. One particular incident springs to mind of a pupil called John who was regarded

by staff as a 'handful' and whose presence in the kitchen was rarely tolerated by staff when he followed them in. Yet on one occasion when his mother made a rare visit to the kitchen, John followed and, like a dog set loose, jumped on the tumble drier and searched for spare milk. This incident made the association in some children's minds between parental presence and changes in rules and routines all the more obvious.

Parental presence may temporarily suspend the established rules and routines of the nursery classroom. It would be interesting if further research could look, in more detail, at how children cope with the differing rules and routines of parent-child and teacher-child interactions when they are both brought together in the classroom. In the staffroom, staff often gave accounts of children who did not behave when their parent was present. How do the children view this situation?

Interviews with older children also revealed a perception that parental presence could temporarily change some of the rules and routines of classroom life.

> Melanie: If they [other pupils] take the micky out of ya, and your mam's there, you can say, "Mam let me hit 'er then." And your mam says, "Yeh, o.k. then." Then you go, 'Phew, phew, phew' around her face. [Her hands move as if hitting someone.] And your mum says, "Not that much. I said you could 'it 'er but not that much."

> Nicolas: That's what my mum used to do all the time.

The children gave an account of their parents giving permission for their children to hit another child, a permission which would never be granted by a member of staff. Yet parental permission was allowing a basic principle of children's culture to be honoured, that of reciprotcity (Davies 1982). Reciprocity can take both negative and positives forms. Thus if a child hits another or hurls insults, the second child can legitimately hit the other back. The permission parents give to children to observe the principle of reciprocity is observed in other studies. Blatchford in his account of playtime in primary schools records that one head argued that:

> Several parents were upset about fighting in their playgrounds. I asked one girl, "Why did you hit back?" She said, "My mum told me if someone hit me, to hit them back.".. We [staff at school] try and encourage them not to hit back, try to get across to them that fighting does not solve situations. (Blatchford:1988:p22)

To what extent does parental involvement hinder the process by which children do as teachers say and not feel they are exceptions to school rules? My interviews would seem to suggest that it is common for parents to enable children to break school rules and, in the process, facilitate childen's own principles of fair behaviour. It is to other aspects of children's culture

and its relationship to parental involvement which I now want to turn.

Parental Involvement and Children's Culture: making sense of and coping with parental presence

Children develop their own culture at school. As Davies, who studied Australian children, has argued:

> ...children busily get on with the business of constructing their own reality with each other, as well as making sense of and developing strategies to cope with the adult world as and when it impinges on their world. This reality and its related strategies I refer to as the culture of childhood. (Davies: 1982: p33)

The culture which children develop is very important to them and provides a context which runs parallel to the official academic and organisational structures of the school. Pollard (1985) argues that to enjoy their day, children must cope with both of these spheres at the same time. There is extensive literature on the relationship between children's culture and the organisation of the school. Many researchers have focused on the way children manage and cope with teachers in the classroom (Delamont 1976: Willis 1977; Hammersley and Turner 1980; Ball 1980; Beynon and Atkinson 1984; Pollard 1985). However, research has failed to focus on how children manage and cope with parents when they become involved in classroom life.

How does the involvement of parents fit into the day-to-day world of the child at school? Furthermore, how does parental involvement affect the common themes of pupil culture - status, competence and relationships? (Woods 1983) I argue, that parents become part of the adult world which impinges on children's culture at school and children have to make sense of this and develop strategies to cope with it.[1]

Given the importance of child culture, I want to begin by looking at how friendship groups affect the child's perception of parental involvement in school. As Pollard has noted:

> a child's friendship group, meshed as it was within child culture, offered a means of defining school and the adult world in the children's own terms and thus of making sense of it (Pollard: 1985: p55).

Here I want to look how a group of tough or macho boys perceived parental involvement. Other studies have noted the existence of a group of macho boys in children's culture (Pollard 1985, Sluckin 1981) who pursue their concerns of status and identity by proving themselves in regularly fighting with other children. How do these boys cope with their parent's involvement in school?

When I asked Neal, a five year old at Allestree School, why his mother had attended his nursery class he replied:

> Neal: When I was little I weren't behavin' meself.
>
> Grant:He kept punching people and yelling.
>
> LM: Is that why your mum came in?
>
> Neal: 'Cause I used to fight 'em.
>
> Grant: Neal thinks he's got strong muscles.

Neal's interpretation of his mother's presence in his classroom fits in with his own self-image as a boy who fights and will not 'behave'. This tough image came across in the interview. When I inquired what Neal and Grant did in class this immediately sparked off an account of a fight with a boy and the friction that existed with this particular class mate.

> LM: What do you do in your class?
>
> Neal: Adam [another pupil] is a pain in the neck.
>
> LM: Why's he a pain in the neck?
>
> Neal: Because he's always bein' naughty. Don't he Grant ?
>
> Grant: He fights. His mum was standin' there and I was standin' here and he come and goes [hits himself] punch.
>
> LM: What happened then?
>
> Neal: I started fighin' 'im.
>
> LM: What did you do [Grant]?
>
> Grant: Told a teacher.

LW: What did his mum do?

Neal: She was at home.

LW: I thought you said his mum was there.

Grant: His mum was there.

Neal: But she left....Adam's a pain in the neck. If he come to my house I'd box 'is teeth in.

As Pollard has pointed out, the friendship groups children form begin to act as reference ground and are a means by which they make sense of their experiences. Both Grant and Neal are forging an image amongst their peers of being tough and willing to fight. The presence of Neal's mother in the school did not threaten this image, rather it reinforced it. His mother had to come to school because he was 'always fighting'. This contrasts with a five year old boy in Baker School who felt his mother's presence was a threat to his tough image.

LW: Do you like it when your mum comes in to school?

James shook his head.

LW: Why?

James: 'Cause their sissy.

LW: Who are sissy?

James: The mummies and the girls are sissy.

LW: You didn't like it when your mum came in?

James: No. I'd like it if my dad come.

LW: Why's that?

James: 'Cause he's not a sissy!

James had to be prevented from "beating up the kids in the playground" when he first visited his class before starting school. The boy associated his mother's presence with 'sissies', an image he obviously did not want to be identified with. Neal on the other hand had adapted to his mother's presence so that it confirmed his own self image. Or it could be argued that the self-image he was developing enabled him to make sense of his mother's presence. Whichever way, there seems a strong link between making and maintaining self-image and making sense of parental involvement.[2]

This example of the reactions of macho boys to parental involvement points the way for further research. First, it indicates the influence of gender on children's experience of parental involvement. It indicates the importance of looking at gender along with class and ethnicity in order to understand what parental presence means to children. Secondly, macho boys are just one type of friendship group which form in school. Studies have highlighted other categories of friendship groups and we might consider how Pollard's 'goodies', 'jokers' and 'gang' groups would have reacted to parental involvement (Pollard 1985). Would the 'attention seekers', 'leaders' and 'teasers' groups of nursery children, which Sluckin (1981) identified, have reacted differently to parental involvement?

In the next part of this chapter I want to look at two patterns of children's behaviour and how they were affected by parental involvement? These behavioural patterns were the habit of 'micky taking' in Allestree School and the competition between children in Mrs. White's class, at Baker School, over the page number they had reached in text books.

Taking the micky: When the worlds of children and parents clash

There seems little doubt that parental involvement infringes on the world of children. Children were all too aware that the presence of their parents could become ammunition in the game of micky taking - an integral part of the children's culture in Allestree School. 'Taking the micky' involved laughing at somebody persistently over some aspect of the way they looked or what they did. "You just take the micky out of them. You just keep doin' it." Melanie gives an example of 'taking the micky'.

> Melanie: These boys were taking the micky out of me. They're goin'. "Oh, you're a really big midget aren't you?" I'm going. "If I'm a midget what are you?" I was taking the mick, I was going [singing], "Ha, ha, ha, you are big, you've got big feet - size sevens." I was going, "At least my feet aren't as big as yours." Laughs.

The art of taking the micky is to find another child's sensitive points and exploit them in front of third

parties. A parent's absence or presence in school was a sensitive point which children at Allestree School exploited to the full.

Although at first it appeared that children whose parents came to school were able to use this as ammunition to take the micky out of those children whose parents were not present, it later became clear that taking the micky was a self defence mechanism. A case of taking the micky before it is taken out of you.

> LM: What do the child-en feel like whose mums and dads don't come [to school] then?
>
> Melanie: Nowt. 'Cause then you could take the micky and say, "Your mam ain't 'ere."(sang).
>
> Nicolas: That's what I used to do, take the micky out of them. 'Cause my mum was sitting over the other side and you said, "Your mam ain't 'ere". And they kept saying, "Shut up!"
>
> LM: Is that what you say to the kids whose mums and dads don't come?
>
> Nicolas: Yeh.
>
> LM: What do they say?
>
> Melanie: They just hit ya. Sometimes they punched us. I don't care. Tell me mum. "Right, I'm tellin' me mum now."
>
> LM: Why do you say that to them, "Your mam ain't here"?
>
> Melanie: 'Cause then you feel really big, you're takin' the mick.

Taking the micky was part of being big, 'showing off', presenting yourself as better than others. It was the general consensus that it was 'good to be big'. But

this attack was out of defence since the children recognised that children whose parents were present at the school were more likely to be victims of micky taking.

LM: When is the micky taken the most when your mum's here or when she's not here?

Melanie: When she's here.

Nicolas: Yeh, they just go, "Your mam is 'ere".

LM: What do they think about you when your mam's here?

Nicolas: They think I'm a weed.

Melanie: You just have to go, "If I'm weed what are you?"

David: When me mum [an ancillary] comes in to see me, when she's gone at play time they ignore me.

LM: Why do you think that is?

David: It's 'cause they're jealous because their mum ain't come in.

Nicolas: They get jealous when their mam ain't in. They get on your wick.

Parental presence may result in increased stress for children. Potentially, parents are a means by which they may present themselves as 'big' (better than others) - but they are also a source of 'taking the micky'. They cope by taking the micky first and by seeing jealousy as the motive for other children's 'attacks' on them.

However, there are positive sides to taking the micky associated with parental involvement.

LW: When does it [micky taking] happen? At concerts?

Nicolas: When I'm in races [at sports day]. I go, "Your mam ain't 'ere". It's good to take the micky.

LW: It's good to take the micky?

Nicolas: Yeh.

LW: What's good about it?

Nicolas: It's better than bein' in a race, taking the micky.

LW: What's better about it?

Melanie: Especially if their mam ain't there.

LW: What's better about their mam not being there?

Melanie: If they take the micky out of ya, and your mam's there, you can say, "Mam let me hit 'er then." And your mam says, "Yeh, o.k. then." Then you go, 'Phew, phew, phew' around her face. [Her hands move as if hitting someone.] And your mum says, "Not that much. I said you could 'it 'er but not that much."

Nicolas: That's what my mum used to do all the time.

'Taking the micky' is more exciting for these children than the sports day their parents have come to see. Parents become a source for taking the micky which makes the event more interesting for some of the children.

The effect which parental presence has on the tendancy of children to take the mickey raises further questions

about the children's experience of parental involvement. Pollard's study of friendship groups amongst primary school pupils revealed a great deal of rivalry existed between these groups. What part would parental involvement play in the way groups define themselves and depreciate other groups?

Parental presence would seem to increase as well as decrease children's chances of winning when taking the micky. It may also help children to cope with other demands of children's culture - the need to be seen as a competent pupil.

Sharing work

In Mrs. White's Junior class parents became a resource which some of the children used to meet the demands which peer groups placed upon them. For example, competition over completing school work. I was particularly interested to hear from this child that her mum's first appearances in the Curriculum Workshops were 'boring'.

> LW: What was it like when your mum first came to the workshop?
>
> Sue: Borin' [Her eyes roll up towards the ceiling.]
>
> LW: It was borin'?
>
> Jill: Yeah borin'. It was quite good but I didn't know what to do.

> Sue: She [her mother] was doin' all the work. All that Mrs. May [her teacher] was doin' was comin' 'round tellin' you what to do. Instead of mum learnin' us what to do.

The initial period of having parents in the classroom for these girls was 'boring'. Boring because the two girls were unsure what they should be doing, indeed, they were experiencing a conflict of expectations. The girls were mindful that they ought to complete their work on their own. In the routine of the classroom pupils normally have to seek the teacher's permission to work together. Suddenly, the mother appears and is doing her daughter's work for her. I recorded in my field notes the tendancy of Sue's mother to take charge of the work:

> Sue's mum was asking Sue, "What's eight from thirteen?" Sue said, "Two". "No", her mum replies, "two and eight make ten that's not right." She accused Sue of not trying. "I'll hit you in a minute", she told Sue, "You're not concentrating." Sue looked very disinterested in the whole proceedings. She sat next to her mum but her body was turned away from her. She was playing with a rubber whilst her mother wrote out the sums and wrote the answers. I feel Sue's mum has a personal preference for Maths, whilst Sue prefers English.3

The daughter experienced a loss of control over her work. She expected her mother to be teaching her instead of her teacher, only to find neither of them doing so. The parent's presence is imposing a new system of interaction so that Sue's expectations are disappointed. Garvey's study pointed to the threat

seven year olds felt at the thought of their parent being involved in their school. In practice, it would seem that for these seven year olds their parents initially did threaten their existing world.

As Davies (1982) noted, when children discover that the rules of a situation have changed they discard them and become open to new rules:

> The children tend to accept that they do have to learn the rules imposed by adults, but will set limits where the adults move outside what the children consider to be their adult rights. (Davies:1982:p160)

Sue obviously felt it was wrong for her mother to finish her work for her. Eventually Sue and her mum negotiated what they would do.

> LW: You think it is alright that your mum does the work with you?
>
> Sue: I think she should write it down but not do the answers.
>
> LW: Why's that?
>
> Sue: It's not makin' us any cleverer.
>
> LW: What do you think [Jill].
>
> Jill: I count wiv' me fingers and my mum writes the number down.
>
> Sue: Same as my mum.
>
> LW: Why is that good?
>
> Jill:'Cause I don't like writin' it down, I like countin' on me fingers.
>
> Sue: I know, and I don't like sittin' all day writin' sums down. Because it takes up most of the time workin' out the answers.

Parents are able not only to carry out work that children do not like doing, they also speeded up children's completion of their work.

> LW: Is it still borin' now?
>
> Both: No.
>
> LW: Why is it not borin' now?
>
> Sue: 'Cause I'm on Book Two (in Maths) and I'm beatin' all the class.
>
> Jill Yeah, I'm on Level Seven (in English) beatin all the class.
>
> Sue: I'm on Level Seven as well, beatin' all the others. Were beatin' both classes plus were on the same page.

Thus, after some negotiation, the mothers take over what the children categorise as the time consuming element of Mathematics, writing the sums. For Sue and Jill, the presence of their mothers at the workshop meant they were able to advance more quickly through the Mathematics and English books - a vital element to the culture of this classroom. The children in Mrs. White's class were in constant competition over the page number they had reached in their Mathematics and English books and some children had developed cheating strategies in order to speed through them. For example, children were allowed to mark their own work. This often led to frantic copying of the answers to questions they had not yet tackled, on chewing gum wrappers or any other piece of small paper which could easily be stored in their pockets. In the context of

this competition, the girls were proud of their status at the top of the class. This reinforced the extra status that taking part in the parental workshops was perceived to procure.

> Sue: They [the children who don't go to the workshop] don't like it because we get new big pencils 'cause our pencils write more than theirs. 'Cause they have to play the games [in the hall when the workshops are on] while we're usin' our pencils. And they like gettin' new ones. They last them a year and they last us half a year.

These children, through negotiation with their mothers, have developed an instrumental meaning for their mothers' presence in the school. Through working with their mothers, the girls are able to enhance their self identity as achievers in the page number stakes. In this way parental involvement also helps to control the stress which studies have recorded children experience as a result of teachers' evaluations of pupils' abilities (Pollard 1985: Jackson 1968).

Having looked at how children respond and cope with their parents' presence in school, we should perhaps look at a further issue raised by my research - how children cope when their parents do not go into the school.

Working out parents' absence

Children were only able to attend the Junior School workshops if their parents were present. If the child's parents did not attend they would have to leave the classroom and have, what for many became, their weekly lesson with the Deputy Head. Inevitably, perhaps, many of these children felt they were 'missing out'. How did the children cope with their sense of exclusion? One boy devised a strategy of remaining in the workshop although his parents never attended. He would say to the teacher at the beginning of a workshop that his mother would attend but she would be late. He succeeded three times in staying in the workshop to try and frantically complete pages of his Mathematics book despite the fact his mother never came. One Bengali father told me, in an interview, that his daughter kept insisting that if he went to school the teacher would have a gift for him. This was obviously a strategy the daughter had developed to try and encourage her father to attend the workshops.

Such quite desperate strategies raise a number of issues. What effect does parental absence have on children's perceptions of their parents and on the division the children may perceive between home and school? Given that there was such competition over the page number reached in the Peak Mathmatical book parents who did not attend the workshops were limiting their child's chances of being ahead in the page number

stakes. Whilst such workshops may break down the boundaries of home and school for some children, is it only at the expense of reinforcing such barriers amongst those children whose parents could not attend?

Having looked at children's perceptions of parental presence or absence in school, we must also look at children's adjustment to changing circumstances. In the reception classes of both schools, great emphasis was placed on parents helping their children to settle into school. The key role which parents have to play in the transition of a child from home to school has been noted in the Select Committee on Educational Provision for Under Fives:

> The move from home to any form of educational provision which distances the child for the first time from the parent is clearly in the child's experience quite a traumatic one and has to be sensitively handled. It is important that the parent is intimately involved in the child's first introduction to the group setting so that the child can develop confidence. (1989:para 6.6)

Whilst parental involvement is seen to be vital to early education (Select Committee 1989 para 5.10) the idea of continuity in parental involvement and its effects on children has been overlooked.[4] The nature and degree of parental involvement which teachers' developed in their classrooms varied. How do children

adjust when their parents can no longer attend their new classroom? How do children make sense of this?

A factor frequently referred to in association with parental absence is age. Here a child uses age to explain the absence of his mother who had regularly attended his previous classroom.

> LW: Is there any other times that your mum comes to see you at school?
>
> John: She doesn't come in to see any of us 'cause she's at work.
>
> LW: Why do you think you don't have any mums or dads in your classroom?
>
> John: Because I'm too big, and they're not allowed in there.
>
> LW: How do you know that?
>
> John: Teacher told me. Because we're too busy doing our work.

For this child the adjustment was made easier by taking on the identity of a 'big' pupil. Teachers may encourage pupils to see themselves in this way and as a result they are able to rationalise the absence of parents.

It is not only age which children use to rationalise their parent's absence:

> LW: What was it like when your mum didn't come any more?
>
> Melanie: Nowt, 'cause I understood then.
>
> LW: What did you understand?

> Melanie: That I have to be on me own so I can learn without me mum helpin' me.

Melanie saw her mum as someone who 'helps' her to complete the work and not someone who taught her how to do the work. As a result Melanie could make sense of her mother's absence because pupils are often expected to concentrate alone on their work. As Jackson points out:

> They [pupils] must keep their eyes on the paper when human faces beckon.. These young people, if they are to become sucessful, must learn how to be alone in a crowd. (Jackson:1968:p16)

There are two observations to be made here about 'working alone'. On the one hand, 'working alone' can help children accept and adapt to the absence of their parent but it can also militate against successful parental involvement in class. In the case of Melanie, it helped her to accept that although her mother had been involved in the Nursery she would no longer be present in the Infant's class. At the same time, because 'working alone' is a common feature of classroom life it can create problems when parents do become involved in class. (I mentioned above the confusion which Sue felt over her mother's presence in the workshop). Particularly since the children saw their parent as someone who helped rather than taught them. This illustrates the impact which classroom

organisation can have on how parental involvent is percieved by children.

In this chapter I have illustrated how children's understanding of parental involvement evolves from the perspectives developed amongst friendships groups. We have also seen the way in which parental involvement may inhibit and enable existing patterns of children's behaviour in school. The majority of children were able to interpret their parents' presence in such a way as to maintain their self image. This was of overwealming concern to all of the children I interviewed. James was an exception in that his mother's presence contradicted his tough image and this led him to reject outright his mother's involvement. I cannot help but conclude, however, that my data indicates that parental presence seems to reinforce some of the more negative sides of pupil culture such as competiton over page numbers and aggressive-defensive games such as 'taking the mickey'. The 'page number stakes' is an activity which the staff themselves would discourage. Baker School used Peak Mathematical books in order that children should progress at their own pace and not compete with others. Competition was rife, and parental involvement in the workshops seemed only to fuel this.

Little emphasis has been placed in research on children's experience of parental involvement. Yet, as Plowden acknowledged, "No advance in policy...have

their desired effects unless they are in harmony with the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him (her)." (Plowden:1967:para9). As this chapter illustrates, I believe, we will only be able to discover how acceptable children find parental involvement to be, as a policy, when we explore its effect on child culture. This chapter has raised many more questions than it has answered about this relationship. It has also pointed to areas of further study which are required. Such research may point to organisational and policy steps which need to be pursued if a satisfactory experience of parental involvement for children is to be achieved. Such policy considerations, I would argue, are long over due.

FOOTNOTES

1. Davies has already noted the way the 'adult world' impinges on children's culture in school but she focuses on teachers (Davies 1982).

2.There would seem to be similar patterns in children's reaction and adaptation to parental involvement amongst both primary and secondary school pupils. Like Sharpe's study of secondary school pupils, there are links between the friendship groups children form and their perceptions of parental involvement.

3.Field notes 17.2.87.

4. Continuity is a key theme in approaches to early years in education (Clark 1988). Particularly, the idea of continuity in curriculum is seen to be vitally

important. Yet, the idea of continuity in parental involvement and its effects on the child have been overlooked.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:
PARTNERSHIP IN THE MAKING?

In this study I have looked at how parents, teachers, nursery nurses and children view parental involvement in schools. The specific focus has been classroom interactions and relationships between parents and teaching staff. In this final chapter I will draw on the themes examined in this study and look at their implications for the rhetoric of participatory partnership. I will also indicate areas which I believe require further research.

Identity

Identity construction, projection and preservation is one of the most important concerns of the individual (Woods 1983). My study has pointed to the identity concerns which parental involvement raises for parents, teaching staff and children.

Identity in the context of the primary school

Studies of secondary schools, for example Wood's study of Lowfield (Woods 1983), would seem to indicate that the bureaucratic nature of secondary schools retards the development of personal relationships. The primary and infant schools in this study, however, were perceived by both parents and teaching staff to place the accent on individuals. Relationships in Baker School were described as 'personal'. In Allestree, the degree to which personal relationships were seen to be the norm is shown by description of the school as a 'family'. It was in the context of the 'family', both real and symbolic, that identities were forged. I will begin by looking at parents and their identity concerns.

Parents

How parents protect and promote their identities in school.

Parental involvement raised a number of issues regarding the identity concerns of parents. Evidence from the horror stories some parents told about staff indicated their general desire to be seen and treated as equals although a number of parents felt staff saw parents as inferior. This was illustrated in Chapter Five when the parents at Allestree talked of stuck up/snotty teachers. It became clear these parents felt very strongly that staff should accept them for who they were. Parents were

not just trying to preserve their identities, however, they also had to adapt to the roles and images expected of them.

When parents and teaching staff first met, parents were not seen as unique individuals, they had to adapt to their identity as one member in a group of 'parents'. As a result, many parents were concerned to project and maintain a certain image. Yet, my research has revealed that there is no clear link between the image staff have of parents and parents' own concerns and interests. Some parents in Baker School were able to project an image of an 'interested' parent even though they were bored by their involvement. Conversely, parents in Allestree School, who had been labelled by staff as wanting to 'get rid' of their children, showed concern and interest in their children's progress when they were interviewed. This implies that parental involvement in school does not automatically lead staff to an understanding of the views and concerns of parents. If the principle of equity between partners is to be realised then addressing such discrepancies in perceptions is a matter of urgency.

We can begin to tackle these discrepancies when we understand why staff type parents in this way and the processes which underlie it. Another task of this study has been to identify such typing and what it revealed about how staff perceived and interpreted parental behaviour in the light of their own definitions of the

situation and their own concerns and interests. A vital element of such typing of parents was teaching staffs' understanding of the role and responsibilities of parents in general and mothers in particular. Teaching staffs' views developed from middle class ideas of child care, duties and responsibilities. Parents' views were rooted in their own experiences and their knowledge of norms within their own social network and extended families. We saw in Chapter Four and Five how parents' views of their involvement reflected their on going experience of child care as working class mothers and fathers.

Some mothers and teaching staff held different views on how child care should be divided between mothers and others, particularly teaching staff. The parents who were seen as wanting to get rid of their children are an obvious example of the conflict which can occur. Mothers' participation in school can be seen as an intermediary domain between the private and public world where mothers' behaviour is open to scrutiny and judgement and attempts are made to modify their behaviour through 'parent education'. An important point to be made is the lack of a clear idea of fathers' responsibilities to their children. Mayall carried out a study of parents' and health visitors' perceptions of child care and noted the difference in the general understandings of mothers' and fathers' responsibilities to their children. A 'responsible mother' meant:

> both taking day-to-day charge and accepting accountability over the years of a child's dependancy for her health and welfare. Further, what mothers do for their children is seen as an appropriate matter for public concern. As regards fathers, health visitors and the rest of us lack a clear views. Do we have a norm for the 'responsible father' or for the good father? Probably we would agree on little beyond what he should provide financially for the family. (Mayall:p327:1990)

There are no clear normative models for how the 'responsible father' should behave towards his children thus his behaviour in school does not attract the same level of scrutiny as the behaviour of mothers. My research revealed the incongruity, in the context of the school, between the myth and reality surrounding women's involvement.

It is not only that women were judged as mothers, some mothers felt they were only seen 'just as mothers' and not as people in their own right. Yet there were examples in this research where the experience of parental involvement facilitated the personal and educational development of women. Whilst personal development of this kind is one of the aims of participatory partnership, my research would indicate that there are problems on how staff perceive it both as a by-product of, and a goal for, parental involvement. Parental involvement may actually extend the responsibility and expectations placed on mothers for the educational success of their children (Davies 1985). Thus if a woman's pursuit of her own personal development takes her beyond, and out of,

involvement in school this may become a negative source in her dealings with teaching staff.

Cultural perceptions of a mother's role, and the attitudes and values attached to it, threaten women's experiences of their direct involvement in their children's education. There is much scope for further research into how motherhood, and the ideology which surrounds it, relates to the day to day interactions when women do or do not become involved in school. However, researchers must not neglect exploring how the views and expectations of fatherhood affect parental involvement in schools.

Teachers

Studies have already revealed how teachers are concerned about their own self-image (Pollard 1985, Woods 1979). Yet research has not explored how parental involvement affects the identity of teachers and nursery nurses and the self image they are trying to maintain. Rather emphasis has been placed on the professional image of teachers as an impediment to the progress of parental involvement.

A common dilemma in teaching is maintaining a particular aspect of self-image or making more pragmatic adaptations to specific pressures or necessities. This poses itself as a choice between a commitment to an ideal self or an

acceptance of a more pragmatic interest. It is interesting to see the significance of this dilemma, which has hitherto been analysed in terms of teachers' experiences of teaching pupils, for their experience of parental involvement.

For some nursery nurses in the study, parental involvement was a threat to their ideal self. Yet for others, parental involvement could potentially enable them to increase their status and responsibility. Teachers' identity concerns were more commonly linked to maintaining a competent image of themselves in front of parents. There were certain circumstances in Baker School in which teachers felt they were unable to maintain a competent image. In Chapter Four, one of the reasons behind staff ending parents' use of the staff room was to ensure there would be no opportunities for parents to witness incompetencies. In Chapter Three, we saw how a teacher at the same school had to adapt and recognise that demands on her time meant she would not always be able to organise the kind of workshop she wanted. Giving parents a more realistic understanding of the demands on teachers was her way of solving a situation in which parents may have potentially seen her as disorganised. In Nursery Four, we saw how a teacher would joke about his lack of organisation in order to distance himself from the formal role of teacher. This strategy enabled both the image and reality of teaching to exist at the sametime. Whilst the behaviour of teachers is affected by

cultural stereotypes, such as the image of being organised and competent, evidence indicates that they are not helplessly bound to such traditional views of their role. The professional image is not simply something staff hide behind in order to avoid parental involvement. A vital process in parental involvement is the way both teachers and nursery nurses must learn to manage the conflict between the image and reality of teaching.

Analysis of relationships between parents and teachers in these two schools needs to be set in the context of broader constraints acting particularly upon the roles of teachers. I began my research just at the end of a long dispute between teachers and the Government over pay and conditions. In the first year of the study, the Government removed the rights of teachers to bargain over pay and conditions of service. We need to question the effect of the long term conflict between teachers and the Government on the development of home-school relations. The continuing wrangles over pay, conditions and responsibilities, the nature and content of the curriculum, the organisation and management of schools have led to a 'new realism' amongst teacher about the extent to which professionally led change is possible (Bastiani 1989). Such a context leads teachers to feel that their role is increasingly being devalued and criticised. In effect teachers, parents, and mothers in particular, are caught in a struggle where they feel their role is devalued by society. In a very real sense,

then, teachers and mothers are perfect foils for each other's insecurities and targets for each other's abuse.

The rhetoric of partnership is in danger of reinforcing stereotypical images of teachers (striving for professional autonomy), ignoring nursery nurses and overlooking the effects of stereotyping of parents in general and women in particular. It would seem that improving relationships between the family and school is as much about redefining cultural images of mothers as it is teachers.

In reality, parents' participation in school involves judging women against the ideal of the 'responsible' mother' which is far cry from the feminist ideal of partnership which was proposed by Eisenstadt (1986). According to Eisenstadt, partnership with teachers should also involve the empowerment of women. As my study has begun to reveal, mothers do exercise a significant amount of informal power in schools. As David (1980) has noted, where women, as parents, do exercise power and influence it had tended to be overlooked. Further research is required into the power and influence exercised by mothers who become involved in school and how this source of power is affected by the participation of fathers in school and changes brought about by legislation.

Resources

The issues of resources involves three elements - space, time and people. The issue of space is most clearly illustrated in Chapter Four regarding parents' use of the staffroom. I have already argued that this incident indicated a desire amongst teachers, documented in some ethnographic accounts of school life, for private space (Woods 1979: Hammersley 1980a). Divisions between private and public spaces in schools run contrary to the principle of sharing resources, common to participatory partnership, and indeed community education. However, in Allestree School, the kitchen in Nursery Four became a 'back stage' region (akin to a staff room) which was shared by staff and regular parents. Parents not only witnessed, but took an active part in creating the public and private division within the classroom.

Further research is required to explore how teachers perceive this separation of spheres and the effects it has upon the relationships which they develop with parents. Evidence from Allestree School would seem to indicate that it is not simply a case that only public areas are shared with parents and private areas are the preserve of fellow members of the teaching staff. However, my study indicates the divisions between public and private areas are more likely to be blurred where solidarity amongst staff is weaker.

Time is another resource which is of importance to parental involvement. Studies have already revealed the dilemmas which staff have experienced in sharing their time between parents and children but not how they deal with it. For some teachers, and particularly nursery nurses, dilemmas over sharing time raised questions regarding the nature of their job. These staff tended to use avoidance strategies which enabled them to cope with the perceived conflict in the time spent with parents and children but this strategy did not resolve their dilemma. There were also examples of staff who adapted their aims of parental involvement in terms of what they perceived to be pragmatically possible to achieve through parental involvement. Here a working consensus, that maximised the interests of staff and parents, produced a framework within which the day-to-day dilemmas of parents' and children's demands on their time would be worked out. In general, staffs' knowledge of parent types was crucial in how they defined such dilemmas and the actions they took. Finally, there were examples of teachers who did not experience a dilemma regarding the sharing of time between parents and children. Here the relationship between their job and the aims of parental involvement were clearly defined and maintained.

People are the final resource I wish to focus on here. The participation of mothers in school is seen as an extension of their caring role so their availability as a resource for teaching staff has been taken for granted.

However, women also use the school as a resource. Indeed, for some women, school became an extension of the private sphere of home. This appears to be a far cry from the principle of reciprocity which is aimed for in participatory partnership which I outlined in Chapter Two.

Parents who become involved in school were also used as a resource by their children to project certain identities, to meet with the demands of pupil cultures, and also as a means of suspending the rules and routines of the classroom. The benefits which children feel they gain from their parents' involvement and the understandings which they develop in relation to it, are areas of parental involvement which has been grossly neglected.

Rules and routines

It was interesting to note how younger children perceived the rules and routines of the class were temporarily suspended when their parents entered their classroom. Further research is needed to look at how children cope with the different, and often competing, routines and rules of interaction which parents and teachers bring together in the class. Children whose behaviour deteriorates when their parents are in the class are a particularly interesting case. As we saw in Chapter Four, teaching staff in Allestree School highlighted the

phenomena of children who 'played up' when their parents visited them in class. Yet how do the children experience this situation? Do they have different perceptions, adaptations and strategies of coping with potentially competing or conflicting rules and routines of behaviour at home and school?

In order to act competently, parents often had to suspend their own knowledge and learn the rules and routines of the classroom. As a consequence they had little responsibility. Since a concern of participatory partnership is the desire for parents and teachers to share responsibility, there is a need to look further at why routines, which appear to prevent this, are so crucial. Routines impose structure on parental involvement. This was clearly seen in Chapter Four where Allestree School staff identified a need for such structure when parents first visited with their children. This period was characterised by the ambiguity which existed over who was in control of children's behaviour. The establishment of routines in such situations was a strategy by which staff established their control. Routines then, are a means by which teaching staff cope and survive.

We have seen how some mothers were keen to escape from the routine of housework by becoming involved in their children's school. Some teachers were also keen to escape the routine of the classroom and 'have a laugh' with

parents. This kind of fraternisation was a strategy by which the staff could establish and develop their relations with parents. The net effect of such contact was to build up a sense of obligation to the staff, amongst the regular parents, which would minimise a parent's desire to 'have a go' at them.

Adaptation and strategies

In this study I have been keen to explore the adaptations which all the partners make to parental involvement in school. That is, the patterns of action which are developed in response to the way in which parental presence is perceived. Parents have to adapt to their new status as members of a collective grouping. They move through various stages from anticipation about their involvement, to an ambiguity over what their involvement means, to an adaptation.

The biography of parents

Parents' experience of their own education has often been cited as a critical factor in how they view parent-teachers relations and the adaptations they make. For Waller (1932), hostility between parents and teachers reflects the negative experiences of teachers which parents knew in their own education. He argues that a productive and egalitarian relationship between parents

and teachers, an aim of participatory partnership, would not be achieved until children had a more positive experience and perception of teachers to carry into adult life. Waller's argument assumes that once people grow up, their own experience leads them to see teachers as a single group. Such an argument overlooks how parents' views of teachers are amenable to change, as this study had illustrated. Parents interactions with teachers can not be understood as simply reflections of their own childhood education. We need to uncover the processes which underlie their encounters with teachers as pupils and parents. Both as pupils and as parents, I argue, these mothers and fathers are aware of the differentiation process of school and the evaluation and judgements which take place. It is as much to the processes of school, as to the teachers who work in them, that parents use their own experience in order to understand. As parents, and as mothers in particular, their behaviour is scrutinized. Parents' views of teachers and schools reflects, not just bad experiences with particular teachers but the working class experience of evaluation and rejection.

Many staff felt it was the duty of parents to be interested in the education of their children. My research did not look at why parents were not interested in their children's education but what **they** found to be interesting and uninteresting about parental involvement. In this way I explored the understandings parents

developed, the motives behind their actions and decisions over whether or not they were involved. As we saw in Chapter Five, the decisions and adaptations which parents made varied according to how they defined their role in the classroom. This in turn was dependent upon: parents' perceptions and experiences of child rearing; how they identified with their roles as wives and mothers; the presence of other parents in the class and so on.

In a sense, the main line of adjustment made by parents was already laid down since the majority felt teachers did not like parents to interfere! Parents were worried about how to raise their concerns with teachers and not appear to be interfering. They adopted general strategies such as full frontal confrontations and 'fishing' for information. This contrasted with strategies which reflected parental knowledge of the forms of interaction which were acceptable with a particular member of staff. Further exploration should be made of the strategies parents develop to raise concerns. How is this process experienced when children transfer to secondary school? Indeed, how do parents experience the status passage from primary to secondary school?

The rhetoric of participatory partnership has tended to focus on teachers' reactions to parental involvement in terms of their professional concerns and identity. I wanted to move away from the idea that professionalism required certain actions and beliefs in response to

parental involvement. Like Wood's (1979) study of teachers in Lowfield, my study also indicated that the energies and talents of teachers were directed at activities not only concerned with 'being professional' but also 'being a person'. Parental involvement provided a way of expanding activities in which teachers could act as people. Conversely, parental involvement in school was also perceived to threaten areas, such as the staffroom, where teachers could drop their public face and become private people. Teachers are also pursuing activities which ensure their survival. The degree to which parental involvement is about survival is indicated in the routinization of parental involvement in school. Routines are a way in which teachers overcome potential loss of control and how they cope with increasing demands on their time. An important lesson to be drawn from this is that it is not simply the desire to 'be professional' which provides us with the means to understand the actions and adaptations of teachers to parental involvement. We need also to look at the significance of survival for teachers and their desire for 'being a person'.

This analysis stresses the importance of looking at situations in which parents are involved in school, how they are defined and the effect they have on actions. Teachers do not have one single view but hold a number of views which pertain to the particular instances and situations in which they find themselves. As a result a

teacher's reaction to parental involvement does not become an either/or option, so characteristic of much that is written on participatory partnership. Instead, we reveal the complexity of teachers' experience of involving parents. A policy of involvement can be seen to be either constraining, pressurising or enabling of classroom actions.

Finally, this research has pointed to the importance of looking at how children adapt to parental involvement. Children adapted to their parents' presence in terms of their own identities and the demands of peer culture. Adaptation was not always simple and the children developed a number of strategies to cope with both the presence and absence of parents.

The actions which all partners take, regarding daily encounters in the classroom, develop out of their understanding of the reality of parental involvement derived from their individual perspective. These adaptations lead partners to pursue certain strategies to achieve the aims which they have developed for themselves. It is only when we begin to understand the different realities of parental involvement for the partners involved that we can begin to bridge the gap to the rhetoric which surrounds it. This necessitates further empirical examination of the principles on which the rhetoric of partnership is laid and existing accounts of the reality of parental involvement.

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH TECHNIQUES, THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR CATCHMENT AREAS: SOME FURTHER COMMENTS

The purpose of this appendix is to provide some additional comments on the techniques employed in this study. It will include details on the amount of participant observation and the number of interviews together with details of the ways in which observations were made and the interviews conducted. I begin with some information on the school populations and their catchment areas .

Allestree Nursery and Infants School

In 1987 there were 230 pupils attending Allestree School. The teaching staff consisted of three full-time and two part-time nursery nurses. There were four nursery teachers, five full-time and two part-time infants' teachers and the head teacher (see table 1).

Table 1: Teaching staff at Allestree School

	Nursery Nurses	Teachers Nursery	Teachers Infants
Full-time	3	4	5
Part-time	2	-	2

Most of the pupils who attended Allestree School lived on the Allestree Council Estate. The majority of the residents were white working class. The estate had been

built during the 1930s and mainly consisted of three bedroomed, semi-detached properties.

There was an acute and persistent problem of poverty on the estate. Figures drawn from the 1981 Census indicate that Allestree Estate, compared with the averages for Midtown, had disproportionately high numbers of lone parent families as well as problems of overcrowding (see table 2 below).

Tables 2: 1981 Census Indicators for Allestree and Midtown

Indicators	Allestree %	Midtown %
Households with over four children	7.8	2.5
Single parent families	6.8	2.9
Over-crowding	4.3	1.2
Economically active seeking work	34.2	12.5

Source: Midtown Council, Inner Area Programme Submissions Document, 1984, p18.

A survey carried out by Sills et al in 1981 indicated that thirty-four percent of the residents were unemployed, nearly three times the town's average. Some thirty-nine percent of households received supplementary benefits. Of those who worked, the majority were in low paid unskilled jobs. A research project carried out by a Community College in the Allestree area revealed that eighty-five percent of residents left school aged fifteen or below and eighty-

eight percent had no educational qualifications (Williams Community College 1985).

Baker School

Baker School had 238 pupils on its roll in 1987. The staff consisted of four infants and seven junior teachers, a head and deputy plus two part-time support teachers (one employed for bilingual support).

Table 3: Teaching staff at Baker School

	Teachers	
	Infants	Junior
Full-time	4	5
Part-time		2

The pupils who attended Baker School had a culturally diverse background although the majority were of Bengali origin. In 1986 Ten percent of the pupils were indigenous white. The other ninety percent of the pupils were of Asian descent of which seventy percent Bengali and thirty percent Gujarati (Widlake 1986). [1]

The Bengali families came both from Sylhet, a district of Comilla, and Dhaka. The majority were from Nabiganj Thana in the district of Sylhet. The women's arrival in this country has been fairly recent and many had little English.

The children at Baker School lived in various types of housing. Most children lived in the terraced houses which surrounded the school that had been built at the turn of the century. A small number of pupils came from a nearby council estate. Other children lived in semi-detached properties a quarter of a mile from the school.

Economic and social indicators for Baker School's catchment area (from the census of 1981) do not reveal the same levels of poverty and unemployment found in Allestree. Lone parents made up 0.5 % of the population. Unemployment stood at 11.49%. Only 2.4% of the people in the area suffered problems of overcrowding in their homes. However, these statistics disguise the uneven distribution of poverty and unemployment in the school's catchment area. A report by Midshire County Council in 1987 revealed that Bengali families tended to live in houses which were poorly maintained, sometimes lacking basic amenities (e.g. indoor toilets), and often overcrowded. There were also high levels of unemployment in the Bangladeshi community (Midshire County Council 1987).

Having described the population and catchment area of both schools I will now go on to give further details about the participant observation and interviewing I carried out during this research. In total, the field work for this research lasted one year and involved

some ninety seven interviews with parents, teaching staff and children. [2]

Participant observation.

My decision to adopt participant observation as a method of collecting data reflected my concern with researching the practice, as opposed to the rhetoric, of involving parents in school. I wanted to collect observational data on the perspectives of both teaching staff and parents. I also wanted to carry out observations on the processes which underpinned the routine contact between staff and parents in school.

Initially, I spent a full week in each of the schools familiarising myself with the different settings and events in which parents were involved. I then limited myself to visiting the schools twice or sometimes three times a week. I rotated the days on which I visited in order to sample different days and events. However, I did regularly attend activities which were organised specifically to encourage parents into the schools eg. parent workshops, drop-ins and 'Child's Play' as well as assemblies and meetings arranged for parents. In Baker School, my observations were mainly carried out during the Spring Term (February 1987 to April 1987) and occasional visits were made to the school during the Summer Term to see the drop-in group and attend the Governors' meeting for parents. In all I spent forty-two days in Baker School. It was during the Autumn Term

(September 1987 to December 1987) that I carried out the majority of my observations in Allestree School, again making occasional visits to the school in the following term. I spent a total of forty-eight days in Allestree School.

I generally adopted the participant-as-observer role: sharing in the events, working alongside people and asking them questions about their actions. I made observations of staff room talk, classroom exchanges, parents in the playground waiting to collect their children as well as any event specifically organised to involve parents in the schools. Initially, my observations addressed basic descriptive questions such as: What do parents and teachers do in the classroom? What do parents and teachers talk about? What is the atmosphere like in the classroom when parents visit? As the themes developed, my observations centred on more focused questions. For example: How do teaching staff talk about parents? How do teaching staff and parents define and redefine parental involvement? What strategies and negotiations are used by parents and teachers in the classroom? The themes which were emerging from my observations were used to develop interview agendas (see Appendix 2). I will now go on to give further details on the interviews conducted during this study.

Interviews

The interviews in both school were carried out after an extended period of participant observation. (In Baker School I conducted the interviews after the first term of observation. In Allestree School the interviews started half way through the first term). Most of the interviews, some sixty-five in total, were conducted in the interviewee's own home. (Although in Allestree School eight of the parents and eleven of the teaching staff felt it more convenient to be interviewed in school). I tended to interview one person at a time. However, at the pilot interview stage, I did interview a group of women at the drop-in at Baker School. This group interview provided an opportunity to test out the interview agenda and see how appropriate group interviews were for gaining the type of data I was interested in. In Allestree School, on three occasions, I interviewed the mother and father together and I also carried out three group interviews with teaching staff (one with a group of nursery nurses and two interviews with two infants teachers).

Sixty-four of the interviews were tape recorded. However, in seventeen of the twenty-seven interviews with Asian parents I only made a written record of the interview. These were parents I had contacted by letter, stating a time when I would call and interview them if they were willing to take part in the study. In these circumstances I felt there would be little time

to actually establish a rapport whereby I could ask the parents if they minded me taping the interview. Furthermore, I felt the interview would be less threatening and intrusive if only a written record was kept.

Interviewing in Baker School occurred after I had been denied access to the school for a second term (see Chapter One). Arranging interviews with staff proved problematic and as a result I was only able interview seven of the fifteen teachers, three infant teachers and four junior teachers. However, I did interview all the teachers who had parent workshops as well as a sample of teachers who did not involve parents in their classroom. I interviewed twenty-four parents who regularly attended workshops and the drop-ins. Of these parents, there were two indigenous white men, five Gujarati men, twelve indigenous white women and five Gujarati women. Whilst the majority of the parents were Asian, only a small number attended the workshops and drop-in. In order to gain more data on the perceptions of Bangali and Gujarati parents I decided to interview Asian mothers and fathers who had chosen not to attend a workshop (This sample included five Bangali women, five Bangali men, three Gujarati women and four Gujarati but I also interviewd four white indigenous parents who did not attend the workshops). The names and addresses of these parents were given to me by the teachers. I asked the teachers to talk through the list

of parents who did not attend their workshops. I then chose my sample of parents in order to explore some of the assumptions made by the teachers about certain groups of parents. In Allestree School I interviewed all fourteen members of the teaching staff. I interviewed twenty-two parents, nineteen were women and three were men. I had second interviews with three of the women who regularly attended Nursery Four. My sample of parents included parents on their first visit to the school as well as parents whose children had been attending the school for a number of years. I also interviewed parents who experienced their time in the school differently (eg as "boring" or "enjoyable"). In addition I interviewed parents in terms of the way they had been categorised by teaching staff eg. I sought to include parents who were described by staff as wanting to 'get rid' of their children or parents who were considered 'pains' (see Chapter Four). As well as interviewing teaching staff and parents, I interviewed four children from Baker and six children from Allestree whose ages ranged from five to seven. I interviewed the children in groups in order to make them feel more comfortable. In order to gain children's perceptions of their parents' involvement in the school all of my sample were children whose parents regularly attended workshops, drop-ins and Child's Play.

For the unstructured interviews I carried out during this study, I drew up a schedule of the topics and

themes I wanted to cover along with a list of research questions I wanted to address. I devised a number of questions which were used to start the interviewees talking on a topic. (The research agendas for interviews with teaching staff, parents and children are reproduced in Appendix 2.)

The principal aim of the field work was to explore how teaching staff, parents and children experienced the presence of parents in school, but particularly in the classroom. My sampling of events and interviewees, the observations made and the questions asked, were all based on the objective of revealing these experiences.

Footnotes

1. In addition there were often children attending the school whose parents were overseas students.

2. This also included three interviews with people working for the Community Education Centre and the Family Education Unit.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW AGENDAS FOR TEACHERS, PARENTS AND CHILDREN

(a) Teachers [1]

Teacher's descriptions of parental presence in the classroom.

Research questions:

What do teachers feel is 'going on' in the classroom when parents are present? What do teachers see to be typical parental actions and reactions in the classroom? How do they explain these actions? What strategies do they employ in order to cope with parents?

Questions for the interviewees:

Describe to me what usually happens when parents visit the classroom?

Some parents come regularly into the classroom what do they usually do?

2. What do teachers 'know' about parents?

Research questions:

What assumptions do teachers make about parents and how they affect teachers' actions towards parents? How do teachers 'working out' what a parent is like? How and why are the assumptions a teacher makes of a particular parent formed and change?

Questions for the interviewees:

Can you describe to me a parent who is a ...(eg pain [2])?

Could you compare for me a parent who is 'a pain' with a parent who you feel wants to 'get rid' of their child?

Can you describe to me the area in which the parents and children live?

Can you describe the kind of lifestyle which the parents and children live?

3. Teachers' perceptions of appropriate ways of behaving with parents.

Research questions:

What do teachers feel is the appropriate way of behaving with parents? Is this something to be negotiated? Do teachers behave in different ways with regular parents and those parents who do not enter the classroom very often?

Questions for the interviewees:

Do parents like to come and talk to you?

Do you often have a laugh with parents?

4. Teachers' and parents' perceptions of the purpose of involving parents in school.

Research questions:

What motivates teachers to have parents in the classroom? What do teachers feel are parents' motives for coming into the classroom?

Questions for the interviewees:
Why do you have parents in the classroom?
Do you have any thoughts on why parents visit/stay in your classroom?

5 How teachers manage parental presence in the classroom?
Research questions:
How do other classroom routines and work combine with having parents in the classroom? Are there conflicts? How are they resolved?
Questions for the interviewees:
You have spoken of occasions when parents talk to you and you have not been able to give your attention to the children .. can you describe such a situation? What do you do in such a situation?

6. Parental involvement and its links to school policy
Research questions:
How does the policy of involving parents in school compare the way other school policies are developed and practiced? Is there an informal consensus over what should be regarded as appropriate action to involve parents? (If not why not?) Do teachers try and influence the way parents are involved in the school and classrooms. What strategies do they employ?
Questions for the interviewees:
In the previous school in which you taught, what contact did you have with parents?

You have already described the kind of contact you have with parents, what influenced you to take this form of contact?

In one of the staff meetings you had a session on the aims of the school. One of the aims was to develop 'good home-school relations' can you tell me a little bit more about that?

(b) Parents

1. A parent's own experience of school

Research questions:

What influence does a parents' own education have on how they experience their involvement in their children's education? To what extent are the values, beliefs and behaviour of parents a reflection of their own educational experience? In what ways do parents use the experiences of their own education as a resource when making sense of their involvement in their children's school?

Questions to the interviewees:

Could you tell me a little bit about your own education? Could you tell me a bit about the schools you went to? [3]

2. A parent's experience of their children's classroom including their first visit to the school

Research questions:

How do parents experience their first visit to the school? Is it what they expected, if not why? Does their experience of the classroom change? If so, how does their experience change and why. How do they decide what to do in the classroom, how do they negotiate this with the teaching staff?

Questions to the interviewees:

Can you describe to me what happened when you first visited your child's classroom?

What did you feel like when you first visited your child's classroom.

Can you describe to me what you usually do when you come into your child's classroom now?

3. Parental motivation for being involved?

What motivates parents to go to their children's classroom, workshops, drop-in group and Child's Play? Do their motivations change, and if so how? What rationals do they develop for continuing to go or deciding to stop going to activities to involve parents in school? What do they see as the purpose of going along to these activities?

Questions to the interviewee:

What made you decide to go to (e.g. the workshop, visit the classroom etc.)

Are there any other reason why you go? Has this always been the reason why you go?

4. Parental perceptions of the teaching staff.

Research questions:

What do parents know about members of the teaching staff? In what way does this knowledge facilitate/influence their involvement in their children's education and interactions with the teaching staff?

Questions for interviewees:

Imagine I was a parent who had never been to the school before, how would you describe your child's teacher/and nursery nurse to me?

Can you describe you child's teacher to me?

5. Other events in the school

Research questions:

What principles do parents employ to decide which events to attend at their children's school? What do parents gain from different events?

Questions to the interviewees:

Are there any other things you come to in the school - assemblies, parents' evenings?

Why do you come?

How does coming into the classroom compare with going to an assembly? What's different about it, what do you get out of it which is different?

(c) Children

1. Children's perception of what parents do in the classroom.

Research questions:

How do children make sense of their parents' presence in the classroom? What do children feel parents do in the classroom? Why do children feel parents are in their classroom?

Questions for the interviewees:

What does your mum/dad do when they come into your class? Why does your mum/ dad come to your class?

2. What do children feel about their parents being in their classroom?

Research questions:

Do children feel positive or negative about their parents' presence and why do they feel this way? Does the presence of parents cause any anxiety for the children? How do the children cope with their parents being present?

Questions for the interviewees:

What did you think about your mum/dad coming into your classroom? Did you like it?

What do the other children say/think about your mum/dad coming in?

What do you do when they come into the classroom?

3. The relationship between children's culture and parental involvement in school.

Do the concerns engendered by pupil culture conflict with parental involvement in the classroom? If there is a conflict how do children cope, what adjustments do they make? [4]

Footnotes

1. These questions were also used in interviews with nursery nurses. I asked additional questions to seek nursery nurses' views and experiences of their job and how this fitted into their experience of parental involvement e.g. issues of teacher and nursery nurses status and responsibilities.

2. In these questions I was exploring teachers' own typologies of parents. During participant observation I had become aware of how the teachers categorised parents.

3. As is the case with much of the interviewing, themes often where raised by the parents themselves. If I had not met the parents much before this was often an ideal question to break the ice. However, parents frequently reflected on their own education throughout the interviews.

4. There were no direct question to ask these issues emerged out of the general conversation with the children - particularly when they were describing what was good or bad about their parents coming into the classroom.